

Countryside

MARCH 2017 

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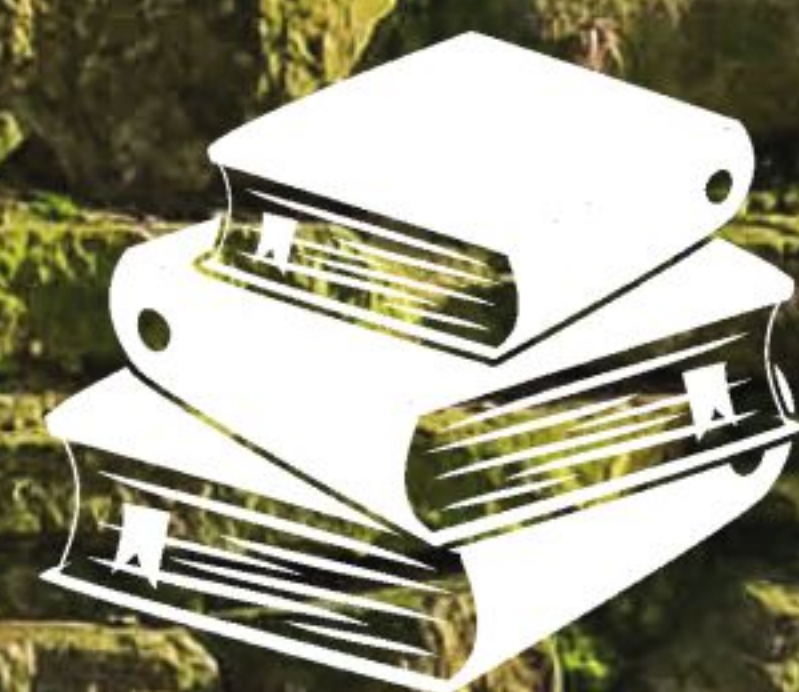
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Built from solid stuff



We all like to think we're unique, but every so often someone comes along who smashes the mould into a thousand pieces. This month, we're featuring just such a person in the shape of Amanda Owen. She grew up in the north of England, an urban girl, unsure of her direction in life, but an unlikely literary connection inspired a love of the countryside and hill farming – and has taken her down an extraordinary path.

Now this isn't a life for the faint-hearted; rugged landscapes, torrid weather, disappearing sheep and long hours make this much more of a vocation than a career. But 20 years on, and 20 years on that hill farm, and Amanda is living proof that hard work and passion really can deliver on the dream. I won't spoil the story too much just now, but, suffice to say, hers is a tale worth reading (and marvelling at) with a cup of tea and a healthy slice of admiration.

Elsewhere in this edition, it's one of the true pleasures of rural life that not only are we surrounded by natural beauty and a stunning farmed landscape, but from Cotswold villages to half-timbered houses and stately homes we are blessed by rich culture and beauty in the form of our homes and property. From Cheshire's Combermere Abbey to Bedfordshire's Wrest Park – plus some rather tempting ideas for rural interiors – we feature some of the country's best, and it's another reason to be rather in love with the British countryside.

Finally this month, as I write, another case of bird flu has just been confirmed by Defra. If you keep poultry – on a commercial scale or a small backyard flock – you are currently required, by law, to house them or otherwise keep them separate from wild birds (there's more advice on page 55).

Only if all poultry keepers pull together, take responsibility, house their birds and keep their flocks healthy, will we see the back of this disease. Over to you.

Martin

Martin Stanhope
EDITOR

Meet the team



Clare Hunt

Flying lambs, slamming barn doors and vindictive splinters – the smallholder life can be a perilous one as Clare explains in her latest missive (*see page 63*).



Lorna Maybery

This month Lorna follows a road less travelled around Bedfordshire, discovering architectural delights such as Woburn Abbey (*see pages 113-117*).



Nicola Stocken

Could 2017 be the year that you master the hanging basket? Nicola gives you all the knowledge you need to make your house the talk of the neighbourhood (*see pages 24-29*).



Charlotte Reather

Weaving with a three-month-old baby in your lap – yes, we always like to set Charlotte some interesting new challenges. Find out how she got on! (*see page 130*).

PICTURE: SFL TRAVEL/ALAMY

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Rural news



YOUR VIEW
Is there a new garden village being planned near to where you live? Do you think they're a good idea? Email: martin.stanhope@nfu.org.uk with your thoughts

Green-fingered villages announced

New 'garden villages' have been proposed for 14 sites across England - from Cornwall to Cumbria - the government has announced. Ministers have lent their support to the developments, which will each deliver between 1,500 and 10,000 properties and establish new villages. Three new larger garden towns were also approved. Together the new sites could deliver up to 200,000 new homes.

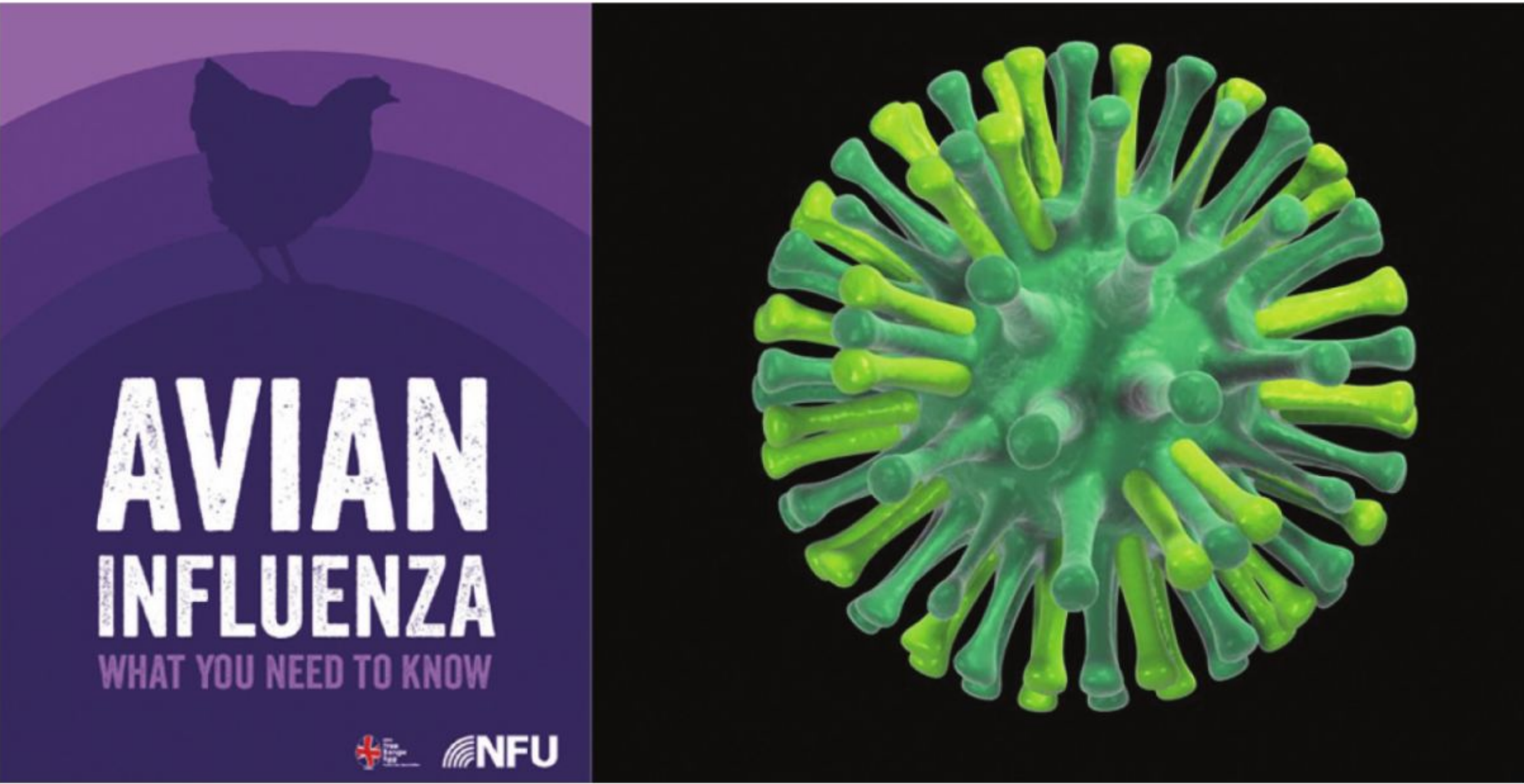
The developments will be distinct new places, with their own infrastructure, rather than extensions to existing urban areas, the government added.

The 14 new garden villages will be in:

- Long Marston in Stratford-upon-Avon
- Oxfordshire Cotswolds, West Oxfordshire
- Deenethorpe in Northamptonshire
- Culm in Devon
- Welborne in Hampshire
- West Carclaze in Cornwall
- Dunton Hills in Essex
- Spitalgate Heath in Lincolnshire
- Halsnead in Merseyside
- Longcross in Surrey
- Bailrigg in Lancaster
- Infinity Garden Village in Derbyshire
- St Cuthberts in Cumbria
- Handforth in Cheshire

The three new garden towns will be in:

- Buckinghamshire (Aylesbury area)
- Somerset (Taunton area)
- Essex-Hertfordshire border (Harlow and Gilston)



Bird flu and the backyard keeper

With a number of bird flu outbreaks this winter, the NFU and Defra are reiterating that all poultry (whether commercial or backyard) must be housed to minimise the risk of infection from wild birds. This is because a prevention zone is currently in force across the UK. See our bird flu biosecurity advice on page 55 for more.

Charity sees surge in demand

A leading rural charity has seen a 67% rise in requests from working families in 2016. The Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution (RABI) has been providing financial assistance to people in hardship from the farming sector for more than 150 years - and last year gave grants exceeding £2m.

"Farmers, in our experience, do not want or readily seek charity. However, our message to them is 'there is no shame in turning to RABI to help you through the bad times'," said their chief executive Paul Burrows.

● If you, or someone you know in farming, is in need of help please call the Freephone Helpline on 0808 281 9490.



Call to back rural shops

The Association of Convenience Stores (ACS) has called on the government to help secure the future of the UK's 19,128 rural shops. A new report by the group calls for action to sustain the Post Office network, deliver on better broadband connection, and business rate relief. ACS chief executive James Lowman said: "The government must ensure that all rural shops are given the right conditions to be able to trade successfully. Without their local store, thousands of customers in rural areas would have no access to post office services, essential groceries and other services like bill payments."

YOUR VIEW
What does your local shop mean to you? Does your shopkeeper or post office go beyond the call of duty? If so, let us know! Email: martin.stanhope@nfu.org.uk or by post to the address on page 3.





Elbow in for forest concerts

BRIT award-winning band Elbow have announced a series of summer concerts in some of the UK’s most spectacular forest settings. ‘Forest Live’ is a programme organised by the Forestry Commission to bring our nation’s forests to new audiences. Income generated from ticket sales is spent on protecting England’s forests and woodlands and boosting their value to people and wildlife. The 2017 dates are:

Thursday 15 June: Westonbirt Arboretum, near Tetbury, Gloucestershire

Saturday 17 June: Bedgebury Pinetum, near Tunbridge Wells, Kent

Saturday 24 June: Dalby Forest, near Pickering, North Yorkshire

Sunday 25 June: Sherwood Pines Forest, near Mansfield, Nottinghamshire

Thursday 29 June: Thetford Forest, near Brandon, Suffolk

Friday 30 June: Delamere Forest, near Northwich, Cheshire

Friday 7 July: Cannock Chase Forest, near Rugeley, Staffordshire

● To find out who else will be playing this year, go to: forestry.gov.uk/music

Flood risks must be managed, says NFU

With extreme weather events playing a greater role in our climate, the NFU is calling on government to deliver better planning and funding of flood mitigation schemes.

The organisation launched a ‘flooding manifesto’ in Westminster in late January, with Minette Batters, NFU Deputy President, saying: “Agriculture is often at the mercy of extreme and changeable weather and this winter has again thrown up a number of severe storms. Just weeks ago forecasters predicted a storm surge up and down the east coast. This demonstrates clearly why government and its agencies must have the necessary long-term plans in place, including the right financial resources, to deal with future extreme weather events.”

● To find out more, head to: nfuonline.com



Farm ‘Oscars’ open for entries

If you have a farming hero – someone who goes above and beyond to produce good food or educate the public about agriculture – why not nominate them for this year’s Farmers Weekly awards?

There are 15 categories covering a wide range of enterprise types, including Farming Champion of the Year and the Lifetime Achievement Award. The deadline for entries is 30 April and the shortlist will be announced this June.



Funding boost for rural communities

The Prince’s Countryside Fund has announced £670,000 of grants to support rural initiatives. The Fund, established in 2010 by the Prince of Wales, has announced that it will be backing 19 projects across the UK through its grant giving scheme. New projects include funding to assist the communities of Alfrick and Lulsley in Worcestershire, the Yorkshire Dales River Trust, Devon Cattle Breeders Society, Herefordshire Rural Hub and Myerscough College.

PICTURES: GETTY; ALAMY

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PARIS

Raphael ★★★★★

There are few more appealing destinations for a spring short break than Paris – and March sees the opening of a spectacular new Rodin exhibition at the Grand Palais, as well as a Vermeer show at the Louvre. Travel with Kirker during April and enjoy pre-booked entrance tickets to both – plus complimentary upgrades on Eurostar (book by 28 February), and a free night at the famous hotel Raphael – where an original Turner hangs in the impressive wood-panelled lobby.



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FURTHER EVENTS IN 2017

THAME COUNTRY SHOW

Easter Sunday & Monday - April 16th & 17th

Thame Showground, Kingsey Road, Thame, Oxon OX9 3JL

HAMPSHIRE COUNTRY FAIR

Bank Holiday Sunday & Monday

April 30th & May 1st

Netley Marsh Showground, Netley Marsh,
Hants. S040 7GY

NORTHAMPTON FOOD & DRINK FESTIVAL

Saturday & Sunday - May 13th & 14th

Beckets Park, Northampton NN1 1HB

BURGHLEY GAME & COUNTRY FAIR

Late May Bank Holiday,

Sunday & Monday - May 28th & 29th

Burghley House, Stamford, Lincs. PE9 3JY

BARLEYLANDS FOOD & DRINK FESTIVAL

Saturday & Sunday - June 10th & 11th

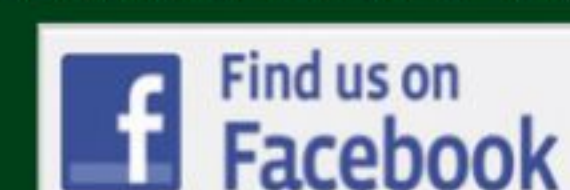
Barleylands Showground, Barleylands Road
Billerica, Essex CM11 2UD

FOR MORE INFORMATION VIEW:

www.livingheritagecountryshows.com

www.livingheritagefoodfestivals.com

Tel: 01283 820 548



Rural news from your region

① ABDERDEENSHIRE

X marks the spot for Aberdeenshire

A high-profile treasure hunt, which is expected to attract more than 3,000 visitors, is to be held in Aberdeenshire in 2019. The UK Mega geocaching event – where participants use GPS and other navigation tools to aid them in their quest to track down ‘geocaches’ – will welcome participants from across the world.

Julie Buckingham, chair of the bid group, expressed her delight at the news, adding: “this is a fantastic opportunity to showcase the incredible scenery and attractions in the north east.”

● For more information about the Aberdeenshire Mega 2019, visit: mega2019.org.uk

② LLANGOLLEN

Llanfest 2017 line-up revealed

Newly-knighted Sir Bryn Terfel has been named as the headline act to mark the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod’s 70th anniversary.

The bass-baritone opera star will be joining a stellar line-up of talent, including the Manic Street Preachers, who will close the six-day celebration of music from around the world. The event, which will be held between 3 and 9 July at the Royal International Pavilion, is expected to welcome as many as 50,000 visitors from around the world.

③ DORSET

Pioneering food labelling launched

A Dorset company – Goldhill Organics – is providing its customers with full traceability of its meat with one simple scan of a mobile phone. Online shoppers who want to know the precise provenance of their food can now trace their meat from field to fork by going online or using their smartphone to scan the



‘Followthisfood’ label on the individual pack of meat – this will show them precisely where the meat comes from, when it was produced, who produced it and how it was processed along the way.

● Visit: goldhillorganics.co.uk

④ CHICHESTER

Homes under the park

Archaeologists have unearthed three large Roman houses in Chichester’s Priory Park. James Kenny, from the local council, believes they could prove to be some of the best of their type discovered in Britain.

“To find what appear to be well-preserved Roman remains in one of the few stretches of open ground in a city which has been continuously built and rebuilt ever since the days of Alfred the Great is really exciting,” Kenny said. The team now hope to raise money through a lottery bid for a community archaeology project to discover more.

⑧ YORKSHIRE

Woodland grants now available

Landowners considering planting new woodlands in the Yorkshire Dales National Park can now apply to the Forestry Commission for grants.

Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority

(YDNPA) senior trees and woodland officer Geoff Garrett said:

“We’re looking for landowners to come forward with proposals for new woodland so we can help them make an application to the Forestry Commission on time, before 1 March.” New woodland will strengthen wildlife habitat networks, increase carbon storage and help to reduce flooding.

● Interested landowners should contact Geoff Garrett at geoff.garrett@yorkshiredales.org.uk

⑦ SURREY

Racecourse ‘closure’ provokes shock

Plans to close Kempton Park have been greeted with dismay in many parts of the horseracing world with leading trainer Henrietta Knight describing them as “absolutely tragic.” The course is home to the world-famous King George race and fans have claimed that a switch of track to nearby Sandown would be a wrong-footed move.

Jockey Club Racecourses, which operates 15 tracks in Great Britain, plans to build around 3,000 homes on the 230-acre site, using the money generated to upgrade other courses and increase support for equine welfare.

⑤ GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Go daft for daffodils

Lovers of spring flowers are in for a treat with Kempley’s Daffodil weekend just weeks away. Visitors can expect a wide range of activities on 18-19 March. The programme includes two major weekend events, with organised flower walks, trips on the ‘Daff & Ride’ bus, luscious lunches and teas, and exhibitions in the local churches. Free parking is available at the local venues.

● Further details can be found at: daffs.org.uk

⑥ SUSSEX

Reprieve for local pub

The Half Moon, a much-loved pub in the heart of a Sussex village, officially opened under community ownership on 23 January, following an eight-month long campaign by locals to save it. Rodney Saunders, secretary for Balcombe Community Pub, Ltd said: “Village support has been critical and our success is a testament to the strong community spirit in Balcombe. Over 300 villagers invested to keep our pub a pub.”



MARCH

DIARY DATES



3rd

 **3-4 March**
Chappel Winter Beer
Festival, Wakes Colne, Colchester

 **3-5 March**
Spring Steam Gala,
Llangollen Railway, Denbighshire

 **3-12 March**
Words By The Water
Theatre By The Lake,
Derwentwater, Cumbria



4th

 **4 March**
Wildfowling Conference, Ramada
Hotel, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands

 **4 March**
Stirling Antique & Collectors Fair
Albert Halls, Stirling

 **4-5 March**
Wray Castle Children's Book
Festival Weekend, Wray Castle,
Ambleside, Cumbria

10th

 **10-12 March**
Scottish Cycling,
Running and Outdoor
Pursuits Show, SECC,
Glasgow

11th

 **11-12 March**
Thoresby Game &
Country Fair, Thoresby Park,
Nr Ollerton, Nottinghamshire

 **11 March**
Borderway UK
Dairy Expo, Borderway
Exhibition Centre,
Rosehill, Carlisle,
Cumbria

 **11-12 March**
Carpin' on, Crown
Plaza, Five Lakes
Hotel, Maldon,
Essex

12th

13th

 **12 March**
Ultimate
Dubs, Telford
International
Centre, Telford

 **12 March**
Chertsey
Ploughing Match
New Haw, Surrey

14th

 **14 March** Sunbury
Antiques Market,
Kempton Park Racecourse

 **14-17 March, The Festival,**
Cheltenham Racecourse



23rd

 **23-26 March**
The National
Homebuilding
& Renovating
Show, NEC,
Birmingham

24th

 **24-26 March**
Great
Yorkshire
Motorhome Sale
Great Yorkshire
Showground,
Harrogate

 **24 March -
9 April**
Ideal Home Show,
Olympia, London

25th 26th

27th

 **25-26 March**
British Truck Racing,
Brands Hatch Circuit,
Fawkham, Kent

 **25-26 March**
East of England Food
Festival, Knebworth House,
Knebworth, Hertfordshire



1st



1 March
Agri-Expo
Kent County
Showground,
Maidstone, Kent



1-5 March
**StAnza
Poetry Festival**
St Andrews, Fife



2nd



2-5 March
**Aldeburgh
Literary Festival**
Aldeburgh, Suffolk



5th 6th



5 March
Donington Rally
Donington Park, Castle
Donington, Derbyshire



5 March
**Classic and Off
Road Motorcycle Show
and Jumble**
Three Counties
Showground,
Worcestershire



5 March
**Border Organic
Gardeners Potato Day**
Springwood Hall, Kelso,
Scottish Borders



5 March
**Anglesey Half-
Marathon**, Starting from
the Menai Suspension
Bridge

7th 8th



7-9 March
Ecobuild
ExCel, London



9th



9-12 March
Crufts
NEC, Birmingham



9-12 March
Affordable Art Fair
Battersea Evolution,
Battersea Park, London

15th



15-17 March
**British
Science Week**
Woolthorpe Manor
Grantham,
Lincolnshire



15-21 March
**Bada
Antiques & Fine Art
Fair**, Duke of York
Square, Chelsea,
London

16th



16 March
**Nantwich Civic
Hall Antique and
Collectors Fair**, Civic
Hall, Nantwich, Cheshire



16-19 March
**Bristol Jazz &
Blues Festival**, Bristol



16-19 March
Hobbycraft, NEC,
Birmingham

17th



17-19 March
**Shire Horse
Society National
Show**, Stafford
Showground



17-19 March
**Spring
Steam Gala**, Severn
Valley Railway,
Kidderminster,
Worcestershire

18th



18-19 March
**West of England
Game Fair**, Royal Bath & West
Showground, Shepton Mallet,
Somerset



19th 20th

21st 22nd



19-22 March
**International Food
& Drink Event**, ExCel,
London



28th



28 March
**Sunbury
Antiques Market**,
Kempton Park Race-
course, Middlesex



28-29 March
**ADBA Research
& Innovation Forum**,
The Building Centre,
London

29th



29-30 March
**RHS London
Spring Plant & Orchid
Show**, RHS Lindley
& Lawrence Hall,
London



**29 March -
1 April**
The WI Fair,
Alexandra
Palace, London



30th 31st



31 March - 2 April
**Practical Classics
Classic Car & Restoration
Show**, NEC, Birmingham

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Meet the Yorkshire Shepherdess

How do you juggle life as a hill farmer with nine children
and a writing career? **Amanda Owen** reveals
all to **Lorna Maybery**



“I’ve always found farming and agriculture a very inclusive and accepting industry to be in; they don’t care who you are, so long as you can do the job”

GROWING UP IN HUDDERSFIELD, a young Amanda Owen had no real idea of what she wanted to do once she left school until a series of books guided her into the world of sheep farming.

A thousand sheep, one husband, a successful TV show, nine children and two books later and Amanda is living a busy and fulfilling life breeding pedigree Swaledales at Ravenseat Farm in a remote corner of Yorkshire.

During the winter months she and husband, Clive, are busy making sure that sheep breeding takes place successfully, followed by lambing in the late spring, while in the summer months there’s more time for farm maintenance and for meeting and greeting the hundreds of people who pass through the farm while walking the Coast to Coast to path.

“For six months of the year, until about 4pm, it feels like the whole world walks through here,” says Amanda. “There’s people from all over the world, Australians and Americans, who walk over the bridge and sit and have a cup a tea with us. Once it gets to end of September and the beginning of October, the walkers tail off and for the rest of the year, it goes back to just the sheep and that times nicely with the farming calendar.”

So how did a girl with no farming background become a first-generation hill farmer? The answer: James Herriot.

Inspiring books

“I loved them and the TV programme, and I couldn’t get enough of them,” she laughs. “I was always an avid reader, but they hooked me. I loved the landscape, people and stories, and I really connected with it.

“The James Herriot books made me think I wanted to be a vet and work with animals, but, unfortunately, I wasn’t academic enough.

“But I trawled secondhand book shops picking up books about horses and cows and sheep ailments. In the library I looked at the animal husbandry shelf and found a new book called ‘Hill Shepherd’ and I was blown away by it as it was full of pictures of hill shepherds going about their business. They were in the Lake District and the Dales around here, and I couldn’t believe it because it was like the James Herriot books, but the scenery in those picture and the people were real characters.

“The pictures were so evocative and gritty and real, and it was something

I had read about but thought belonged to another time, but then I realised that the landscape and the life still existed. So I didn’t need to be a vet, I needed to be shepherd.”

Determined to follow her dream, Amanda, now 42, took on a series of general farm labouring jobs around the country, answering ‘help wanted’ adverts for jobs including milking a few head of cattle, filling in during lambing time and even learning to shear sheep by watching the New Zealand experts and then repeatedly having a go herself.

“I had no money and lived mostly in basic caravans but, by talking to people and being enthusiastic and working hard, I found you could get work. I’ve always found farming and agriculture a very inclusive and accepting industry to be within, they don’t care who you are, so long as you can do the job,” says Amanda.

First meeting

Amanda was working as a relief milker on a small dairy farm when she crossed paths with her future husband, Clive.

“The farmer also had a small flock of Swaledales and he had a tup that needed picking up from a farm, so that’s how I ended up coming here to Ravenseat for the first time. I got the pickup and followed directions and I came here in the dark in the middle of nowhere high in the hills and didn’t know where I was going. I couldn’t understand why there weren’t fields and why the sheep were wandering around on the roads.”

Clive is from Doncaster and is also a first-generation farmer. He spent his early childhood in Doncaster then his family moved to Tebay to work on the motorway and Clive enjoyed watching and helping local farmers. He got the bug, so did all kinds of work to get money together to become a tenant farmer at Ravenseat.

“When I first came we just talked and I picked up the tup and went again and I didn’t give it a thought. He rang me a week later and asked if I could give him a hand as he had a sheep with a broken leg and needed help setting it. It pulled at the heart strings, so I came back and helped him and then I would come and help every so often.

It was a slow-burn romance!

“It’s gone full circle. I didn’t know at the time, but these farms were used as the backdrop to the TV series ‘All Creature Great and Small’. When they were filming they needed places to look like the 40s and 50s. I still can’t believe it!”

MANY HANDS:
Making hay is something that the older members of the family can help out with



BEAUTIFUL ISOLATION:
Ravenseat is a long way from anywhere, but it’s also on the route of the Coast to Coast footpath





TOUGH TIMES: The sheep have to be checked whatever the weather!



Writing success

Amanda has followed her literary heroes lead and has just finished writing her second book, the first hitting the top of the non-fiction book charts. But she first came into the public eye during the TV series 'The Dales', which captivated millions of viewers, much to Amanda's bemusement.

"I'm not sure why as nothing happens! It's no effort on our part as it's what we are doing anyway. People like that, apparently! I was then asked, would I be interested in writing a book and I had never thought about it before. I was asked to come to London to meet some publishers and a week later I had a book deal with Macmillan.

"The lady at Macmillan really swung it for me as she said, 'you know we publish James Herriot?' and my ears pricked up, and I thought, yes, that's good, it's meant to be.

"So I signed a contract that said I needed to hand in 80,000 words and then thought – what have I done? I've never done anything like that before."

Amanda soon realised that she didn't really have the time to just sit and write for hours on end, not with a growing number of children around the place and sheep demanding her attention, so she devised ways to fit the writing around her lifestyle.

"I started writing on an ipad and then just wrote as I was doing stuff. If you think of something,



All about the sheep

Hill farming can be a tough life, life, but it also means that the sheep have to be a tough breed, and Swaledales fit this bill. At Ravensseat, Amanda and Clive farm mostly this hardy breed.

"It's a closed flock so we never buy in females only males," explains Amanda. "There's 2,000 acres, including moors and although it's enclosed, they can go where they like within this range. We have 650 breeding ewes, 250 replacement gimmer hogs and then whatever else we've got at the time. Altogether there's more than 1,000 sheep here.

"A lot of people don't understand what hill farmers do. We breed sheep. It wouldn't make sense to fatten anything here because we have short summers and long winters, and no arable crops. We just have grass. We get the animals here and then sell them on to local farms.

"Each year, we have 250 keepers that stay. The surplus is sold onto other farmers. We don't tend to keep the older sheep because it's such hard living, so after three or four sets of lambs we take them to market and they're sold to breed for a few years in the lowlands. With the males, we keep the cream of the crop; we can't use them much on our own sheep because of inbreeding, but the intention is to sell the tups. It's all about pedigree breeding.

"Everyone has a picture in their minds of lambing and it usually involves a big shed stacked with sheep and a very long orange glove! Lambing time for us isn't like that. Because they're Swaledales and a native breed we want them to have one lamb to replace itself. We do have twins, but our lambing percentage is in the region of 146 per cent, which is low compared to commercial farmers.

"We try to lamb outside. We go around the fields and check on lambs and pick up on problems rather than deal with obstetrics. That works for us. There will be someone up at first light to see what's going on. It's a hard time of year, but the rewards of going into the fields and seeing the lambs is lovely and makes it all worth it."





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• BY SAXON •

you've got to write it down as you go along. Having a phone with a voice recorder is great, too. If I'm in the right mood I can write, even if it is just five minutes between doing other stuff.

"There isn't a secret Spanish au pair sitting in a cupboard somewhere and there isn't a secret farm manager doing all the work, because if that was happening I wouldn't have anything to write about. If you want something doing, ask a busy person."

After the success of the first book, Macmillan asked her for a second.

"The obvious thing to do was to write about what happens on the farm over the course of a year," says Amanda. 'But then I get 'second bookitis' – that feeling that you've written the first one and it did well, how can you live up to that expectation. It's like winning with your tup and becoming champion. You're on cloud nine and feeling elated. Then you've got a weird drop-off as you realise you can't do that again and can't better it."

The second book, 'A Year in the Life of a Shepherdess' has, in fact, proved as successful as the first, and Amanda is thrilled with the reviews. But this down-to-earth hill farmer definitely hasn't allowed success to go to her head – there's no time for that. There's sheep to check and children

to dress and feed – and another book to write!

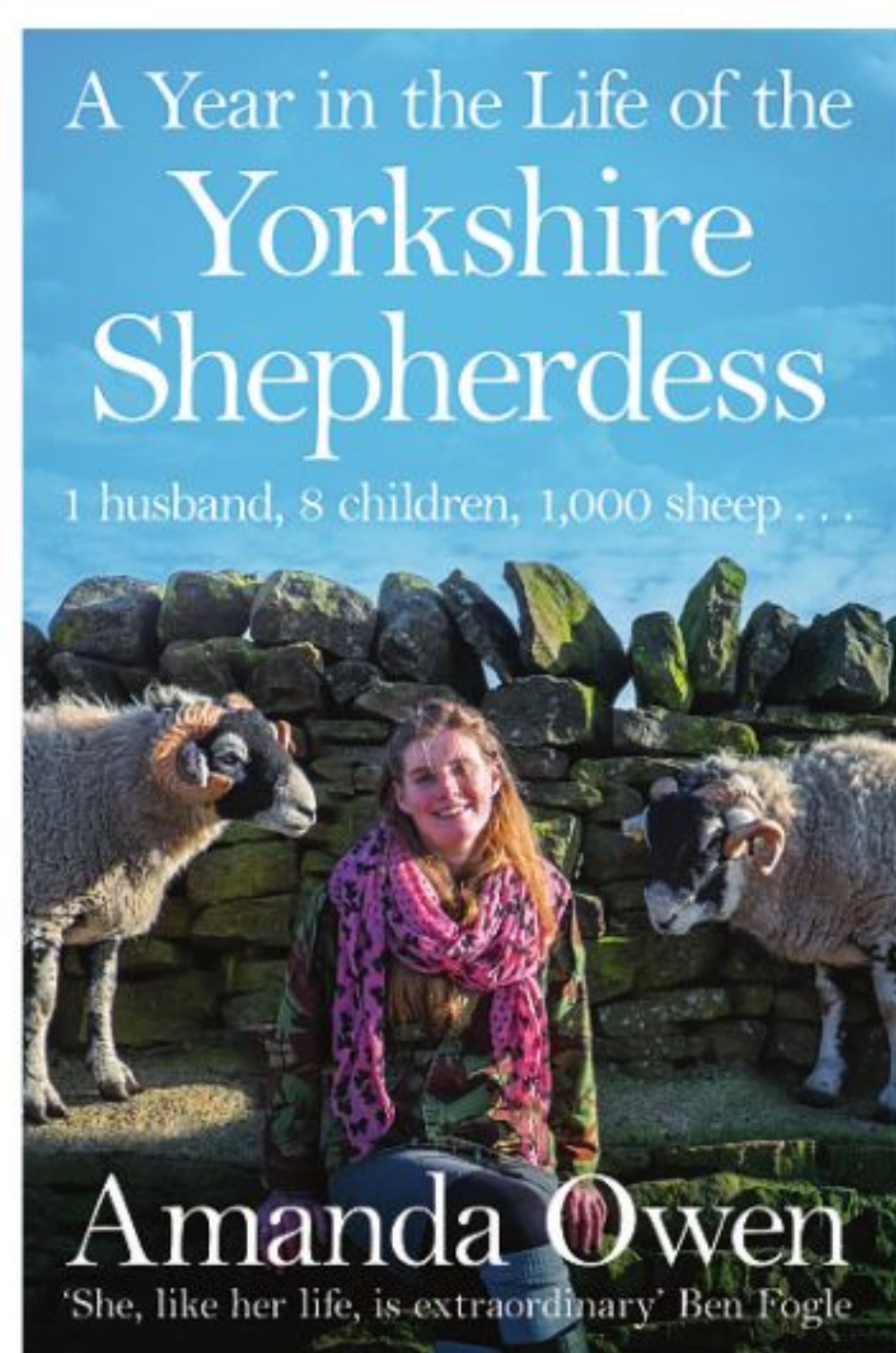
"Yes, I'm going to write another one," Amanda admits. "It needs to be about what I know and has got to involve the children, and the countryside, but it's also got to be a bit different.

"I bought a farmhouse that came up for sale down the track opposite the end of our road. I needed to invest in my children's future and give them somewhere to live if they stay round here and have spent the past 18 months doing it up and turning it into a real farmhouse. So I am going to write about this – in between everything else, of course!" 🐏



Win a copy of the book

We have five copies of 'A Year in the Life of the Yorkshire Shepherdess' to give away. For your chance to win one, send your full details to Yorkshire Shepherdess Competition, c/o Heather Lewis, Countryside Magazine, NFU HQ, Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire CV8 2TZ or email: heather.lewis@nfu.org.uk. Closing date is 6 March 2017.



PICTURES: IAN FERGUSON



GROWING FAMILY: Amanda and Clive with seven of their children. Two more have arrived since this photo was taken

Family life

Most of us struggle to juggle life with a full-time job and a couple of kids, but Amanda has nine children, aged from 15 years to six months. There's Raven 15, Rueben 13, Miles 10, Edith 8, Violet 7, Sidney 5, Annis 3, Clemmie 18 months and Nancy 6 months.

It means there's never a quiet moment, but she loves it and the children help out on the farm in between school, and get life lessons through the medium of the great outdoors.

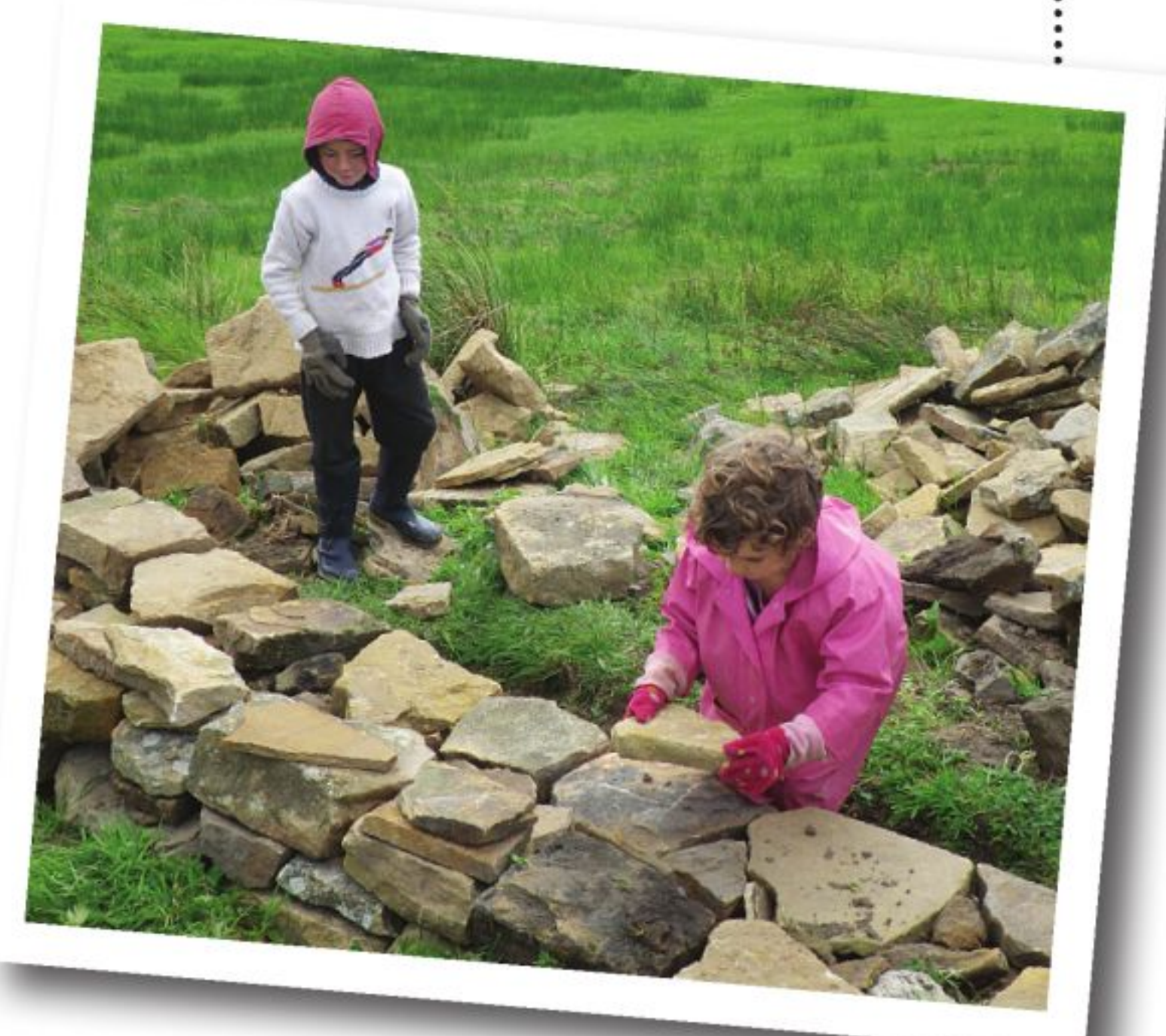
"There's things that are important to do and things that aren't. I'm not perfect," admits Amanda, "the house could probably do with a good clean. But the kids have got smiling faces, and everyone is fed and happy. Everything gets done that needs to get done.

"The children are all different characters and looks. When the kids get home Edith will feed some of the sheep, she loves doing that. Reuben is into mechanics and engineering, Raven is academic and wants to be a vet or doctor. Miles happy in own company and is more of a thinker.

"I've never done a jigsaw with the kids, but we've done dry stone walling, which is like a jigsaw. We talk, we cook and bake, we do lots of stuff. I'm in a unique position as I work where I live.

"I never planned to have a big family, I just go with the flow, live day to day. It's not 'The Waltons', and Clive and I aren't skipping around holding hands all the time.

"It's hard work with up and downs. But I wouldn't change my life, I like it and I'm happy."





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Unsung herons

Steve and Ann Toon discover more about one of Britain's most striking birds



Words by: Steve and Ann Toon

Steve and Ann spend their time exploring the natural world at home and abroad



TARSET BURN, Chirdon Burn, the North Tyne – whichever direction we choose for a leisurely riverside stroll from home we're sure to spot one of these. Motionless as a mannequin by the babbling waters' edge, or languidly lifting off over the trees with wings draped for flight in that classic 'm' shape, feet pointed as neatly as a ballerina; a grey heron is guaranteed to punctuate our walk at some point.

It seems that wherever there's water; whether weir, wetland or rocky shoreline, this tall, leggy British bird is bound to feature. A regular in our countryside, it's certainly a species that's come to symbolise the UK's vital wetland habitats and the need to champion them.

This is a fitting time of year to focus on herons. They signal that spring is finally on the way, as herons are among the earliest nesters and right now are returning to their heronries in number to breed.

It's a busy period for the birds and one of the best times of year for us to see these normally solitary birds, noisily gathered together in one place.

It's worth paying a visit to a long-established heronry in late winter – the tried and trusted spots where many herons return annually to breed and raise their young, males often using the same nests each year. It's a great way to shake off seasonal cobwebs and observe one of Britain's biggest birds as they fly in and out

using their impressive almost two-metre wingspan to full potential.

It can be a bit full-on at some of the larger ones, with the cacophony of croaky ‘fra -ank’ calls and bill-clapping, as males threaten unwelcome suitors one minute and woo the females the next. And then there’s the ever-present pungent smell. Not something you’d want to bottle.

Many heronries are high in the trees, with nests concentrated some 25 metres or more off the ground, although it’s not unheard of to come across herons gathering to nest on man-made structures, cliffs or even lower down in reedbeds on occasion.

The biggest heronry in the UK today is the one at Northward Hill, Kent, an RSPB reserve which, at its peak, boasted as many as 200 pairs. Today’s count is down a bit on that at 150 pairs. Impressive as that



HEY, GOOD LOOKING:
This heron is preening
itself to keep its feathers
in top condition

Heron trivia

All the better to spear you with...

The grey heron has an elongated neck vertebra that’s specially adapted to form a hinge when the heron darts its head forward when hunting, which helps ensure its success. That sharply pointed bill doesn’t go amiss either, of course.

What big feet you’ve got...

Clown-like perhaps, but there’s no disputing large feet and toes do help support the bird’s body weight when hunting in marshy, wetland habitats.

You’re so vain...

Preening is important for any waterbird and grey herons are no exception. They’re equipped with special feathers, referred to as ‘powder down’, which they comb through with a toenail or their beak to release an in-built supply of special absorbent dust – rather like we’d use talcum powder.

still sounds, however, Northward Hill’s not a patch on the one back in 1866 at Great Snowden’s Wood, near Brede, in Sussex, which is reported to have had as many as 400 nests.

Northward Hill remains newsworthy today, however, as the nesting herons have been joined at the site in recent years by a colony of 50 pairs of tropical-looking white herons, known as little egrets, which also breed on the reserve. First appearing in numbers in the UK in 1989, and breeding in Dorset in 1996, these recent colonists can be found both as a winter visitor and breeding species in numerous sites around the UK.

Once the noisy heron courtship rituals have been conducted and a pair bond is formed the female tidies and rebuilds the substantial nest ready for the next brood, using twigs and branches brought by her mate. A clutch of three or four eggs is laid in late February or March.

When they’re old enough, the chicks will venture away from the nest, out along branches close by their home to try out their wings, sometimes using their bill like a hook to support themselves. They’re ready to fly within the boundaries of the heronry at seven weeks, and by nine weeks they’re fully independent.

The most recent estimate of the grey heron population in the UK, from the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), which has been monitoring heron numbers annually in the UK since 1928, suggests there are around 12,200 in the UK.

Very cold winters spell bad news for grey herons, which is why our recent spate of mild ones has been good news for these lean, leggy waterbirds.

Overall, the long-term trend is good for grey herons. While other common bird species have seen mixed fortunes, herons have been increasing steadily since the 1960s.

The creation of new habitat, the health of our rivers, and a decline in persecution by anglers have all helped make this striking and statuesque bird an ever-present feature of our forays into the countryside. Keep a keen lookout for them next time you go for a walk... 🦢



BIRD’S EYE VIEW:
Heron are rather at
home in the tree tops



NEWCOMER: Little
egrets are also now
nesting in the UK

The UK's top heronry spots

1 Culag Woods, Lochinver, Scotland

Grey herons come to nest here from miles around in the breeding season and, at peak times in recent years, there were more than 30 pairs nesting here atop the tall spruce trees.

● culagwoods.org.uk

2 Muncaster Castle, Ravenglass, Cumbria

Muncaster estate has a centuries-old heronry and visitors to the castle today can enjoy them each afternoon at the daily wild heron feed which takes place at the Cannon Bank at 3pm in the winter and 4pm from 26 March to 31 October.

● muncaster.co.uk

3 Trentabank Reservoir, Macclesfield, Cheshire

More than 20 pairs of herons nest amongst the larches toward the eastern end of this reservoir, one of the largest heronries in the Peak District.

● cheshirewildlifetrust.org.uk

4 Ellesmere, north Shropshire border

Nesting herons return each year to nest on an artificial island built in the early 19th century, said to be one of the easiest heronries to view in the UK.

● heronwatch.org.uk

5 Coed Llwyn Rhyddid, Wales

This mixed woodland reserve plays host to the third largest heronry in Wales. The reserve warden runs special heron watching trips into the woods to ensure the birds are not disturbed.

● For details of the organised viewings, contact r.parry@welshwildlife.org or telephone 01656 724100.

6 Swell Wood, Taunton, Somerset

This RSPB reserve near West Sedgemoor, part of the Somerset Levels, lays claim to being another of the UK's largest heronries with more than 100 pairs.

● rspb.org.uk

13 Attenborough Nature Reserve, Beeston, Nottinghamshire

Known as the Attenborough heronry, the first nest here was recorded in 2007, and has now increased to an impressive 40 or so nests.

● nottinghamshirewildlife.org

12 Besthorpe Nature Reserve, Collingham, Nottinghamshire

This reserve in the Trent floodplain is home to one of the county's biggest heronries. The birds are attracted by the attractive mix of reedbed, open-water-with-islands and shingle habitats.

● nottinghamshirewildlife.org

11 Titchmarsh wetland, Thrapston, Northants

Visit now to hear the noisy breeding calls of the herons and catch a glimpse of activity at the heronry located in the reserve's pines.

● wildlifebcn.org

10 Coombe Country Park, Coventry, Warwickshire

The county's largest heronry with some 50 to 60 pairs. A hide provides views of the nesting birds.

● coventry.gov.uk

9 Stocker's Lake, Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire

One of the oldest gravel pits in the Colne Valley is home to the county's largest heronry.

● hertswildlifetrust.org.uk

8 Northwood Hill RSPB Reserve, near Rochester, Kent

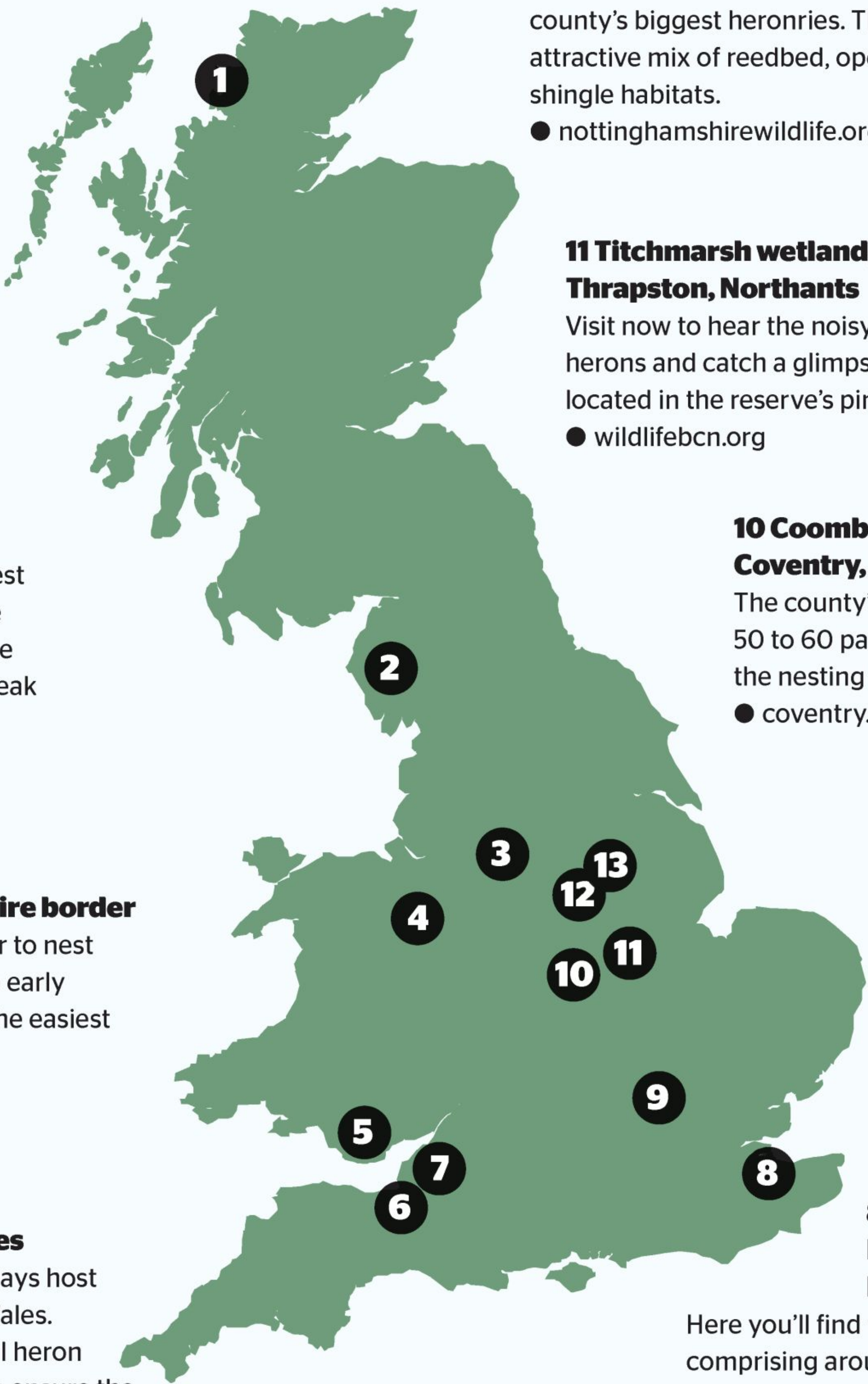
Here you'll find the UK's largest heronry comprising around 150 pairs. They've been joined since 2000 by some 50 pairs of little egret which also breed at the site.

● rspb.org.uk

7 Cleeve Heronry Nature Reserve, Cleeve, North Somerset

A large heronry in a small woodland, with more than 40 nests topping the oak and ash trees. Although access is by permit only, there's a handy layby from which to watch adult herons flying in and out with food for their young.

● avonwildlifetrust.org.uk



Baskets for all seasons

Whatever the time of year, there's always space for a hanging basket, says **Nicola Stocken**



FLOWERS NEVER FAIL to lift the spirits and, despite the garden being largely stripped of foliage and flowers, there's a handful of real beauties that flourish in containers.

Displayed at eye level, a hanging basket filled with evergreens and long-lasting bulbs creates maximum impact for minimum effort. Right now, when the days are still short, it provides welcome cheer for weeks on end, perhaps by the front door or within sight of kitchen or lounge windows – provided it's a sunny spot sheltered from frost and winds.

Hanging baskets come in a range of sizes, shapes and styles, such as woven rattan, willow or plastic-coated wire which can be filled with either sphagnum moss, coco fibre or a felt liner. As an alternative, plant up a traditional wicker shopping basket (provided its handles are strong enough) or wall basket to fix to wooden fence posts or walls. Any suspended basket, with its layers of colour and cascading tiers of foliage, is container gardening at its simplest, provided a few simple rules are followed.

Whatever the style of basket, it must be sufficiently large for the plants to grow healthily, with space to pack with potting compost that's specially formulated for containers. Adding grit to the compost improves drainage, whilst adding water-retaining gel is essential for summer containers. The gel absorbs moisture every time a container is watered, metering it out for the plants to use as needed. Finally, if the plants will put on a lot of growth, they will benefit from slow-release fertiliser.

A fully-planted basket is heavy, so its support must be sufficiently strong to take the weight. There's a range of sturdy hooks or brackets available which are designed to be securely screwed onto timber, brickwork or rendered finishes. Watering is essential too, both in the face of summer's heatwaves or winter's dehydrating winds.



Words by:
Nicola Stocken
Nicola travels all over the UK photographing and writing about outstanding gardens



Simple planting combinations have most impact. Eye-catching colour schemes are based either on contrasting hues that make a bold statement – purple and gold or blue and orange, for example – or, to create a softer, more informal effect, harmonising colours that are adjacent in the colour wheel.

Colour is a good starting point for design. Colours can simply be divided into neutrals (greens), warm (reds and oranges) and cool hues (blues). While much gardening advice states that bright, warm colours should be used sparingly to avoid the overall effect appearing garish, they're also stimulating, and few would deny that a box of golden daffodils is a welcome sight when you first draw back the curtains in the morning. It works because the daffodils are planted in a block of the same colour, and have instant impact.

Whatever the flower colours, foliage provides a leafy backdrop and foil, creating a balanced blend of colour and texture that's far more pleasing than a messy jumble of colours. Take care to choose compatible varieties in terms of flowering times, growing conditions, and with similar growth rates to avoid one plant enveloping another.

Before planting, loosely position the plants (still in their pots) in an empty basket to ensure they're not overcrowded. When planning a hanging basket, it's worth trying to arrange the plants so that the proportions work. The tallest plant should go in the centre where it can't overshadow any others – maybe a skimmia, dwarf conifer or *Euonymus fortuneii* for winter or spring.

Then, for summer and autumn, there are ornamental grasses in reds, greens, golds or browns that form a fountain effect, providing a complementary background from whichever angle the basket is viewed.

Trailing plants are essential too, to drape decorously over the container's silhouette.



Step-by-step planting of a late winter hanging basket

Many early flowering bulbs are widely available from garden centres, sprouting and ready to plant in containers with violas, heathers, skimmias, trailing periwinkles, ornamental grasses and evergreen foliage plants such as ivy and euonymus. Follow this simple step-by-step guide to plant a 35cm diameter, rattan hanging basket for long-lasting winter colour...

This late winter wicker hanging basket is planted with *Stipa tenuissima*, Narcissus 'Tete-a-Tete', *Muscari armeniacum*, *Erica x darleyensis* 'Bing', *Hedera helix*, *Euonymus fortunei* 'Emerald Gaiety' and variegated ivy.



1 Having punctured the plastic lining with drainage holes, largely fill the basket with potting compost.



2 Gently remove the Narcissus 'Tete-a-Tete' bulbs from their pots and tease out the roots. As they're tall, place near the middle of the basket, but leave a small space right in the centre.



3 Place the taller *Muscari armeniacum* bulbs with the Narcissus 'Tete-a-Tete', leaving a small space in the very centre.



4 Place variegated ivy at the edge of the basket to trail over



5 Use the shorter white heather to fill any gaps around the edge of the basket.



6 Place the *Stipa tenuissima* in the space left in the very centre.



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SPRING

As some of the most spectacular bulbs emerge in an astonishing spectrum of colours, there's no mistaking that tulip season is in full flow.

Amongst the prettier blooms are a number of species - saxatilis and chrysantha appearing in early spring - that are most easily admired at eye level.

By mid-season, dwarf tulips appear, with firm favourites such as 'Little Red Riding Hood' or 'Pinnocchio' with scarlet-and-cream flowers that open wide in the sunshine, measuring an amazing 10cm across. Even the leaves are striking, broad, glaucous and with dull maroon stripes.

Tulips lend themselves to 'layering', a planting technique to create a succession of colour. Tulips blend well with saxifrages that froth over the edges. For rounded leafy clumps, there are polyanthus or *Bellis perennis* daisies, which offer green rosettes of leaves, as well as a seemingly endless succession of pinkish flowers that take over from the tulips.

Another plant group that suits small containers is the rock plant family which encompasses dwarf conifers and petite perennials such as aubretia, veronica, sea thrift, dwarf cranesbill, pinks and saxifrage.



SUMMER

Ask a gardener to describe a typical hanging basket, and it will most likely be one that overflows luxuriantly with petunias, pelargoniums, lobelia and trailing verbenas. For adding spot colour or decorating a new pergola while the young climbing plants mature, these midsummer baskets are ideal.

As midsummer peaks, hot-coloured plants come into their own but, somewhat surprisingly, many gardeners shun yellow and orange coloured summer flowers in favour of soft, safe pastel shades. It's an opportunity missed because hot colours are exciting and really stand out, contributing to many striking colour combinations. Daisy-like gerberas, a popular cut flower as well as sensational summer bedding, are readily available from garden centres in a wide variety of warm to sizzling hues. Hot favourites to trail over the sides include long-lasting Mexican creeping zinnia (*Sanvitalia procumbens*) or Calibrachoa 'Million Bells Crackling Fire', a tender perennial that trails as readily as petunias, but with flowers about half the size.



AUTUMN

By late summer, many hanging baskets are well past their best having flowered for weeks on end, so now's a good time to turn to foliage plants for colour and interest.

The greatest variety is found in heucheras and heucherellas, which have pretty flower spikes and beautifully shaped and marked leaves - lobed, rounded, ruffled or heart-shaped foliage, the colours ranging from delicately patterned green to shades of nearly black, purple, crimson, pink, gold, orange, red, brown and silver. Look out for *Heucherellas* 'Glacier Falls' and 'Redstone Falls'. All varieties enjoy partial shade, but some thrive in full sun while others prefer

full shade. At this time of year, gardeners are spoilt for choice for flowering plants, with autumn cyclamen, crocuses, Japanese anemones, gentians and miniature chrysanthemums - fondly known as 'pot mums'. As the season advances, there are berried shrubs such as the orange-berried Christmas cherry (*Solanum pseudocapsicum*) or checkerberry (*Gaultheria procumbens*), a dwarf shrub that, growing to a mere 15cm in height, spreads indefinitely, making it a wonderful filler in autumn pots.



WINTER

Small bulbs are the mainstay of winter and spring baskets. With a little planning, it is possible to enjoy flowers such as grape hyacinths, irises and daffodils for several months by choosing early, middle and later flowering varieties. Early daffodils include 'February Gold', 'Jetfire' and 'Tete-a-Tete'.

From the grape hyacinth family, *Muscari armeniacum* flowers from late winter. Then there are miniature reticulata and danfordiae irises which appear from January, their spiky green leaves adding body amongst other later bulbs such as cyclamen, scillas and crocuses, all ideal for baskets. To add a softness, the small ornamental grass *Stipa tenuissima* is hard to beat.

So too are tough, evergreen flowering plants that include violas, skimmias and winter heathers in shades ranging from pure white to pink or red. Trailing plants such as periwinkles and ivies are a must - variegated forms are especially useful because they shine even on the gloomiest of days.



Milk with the golden touch

Gold Top Milk has seen a popular revival in recent years, even attracting the attention of famous popstars. **Chad Mulholland** finds out what's behind this milk's renaissance



Words by:
Chad Mulholland
Chad is a graduate trainee at the NFU with a love of farming and rural life

MORE THAN 50 YEARS AGO, a group of enterprising Jersey and Guernsey cow farmers agreed to combine their skills and resources by forming a new farming co-operative.

Recognising the potential of their high-quality milk, they formed a new company, the Quality Milk Producers Ltd, to market and promote their new milk brand, 'Gold Top Milk'. They successfully registered the brand name in the 1970s, and from this point onwards they have evolved an ever-expanding range of quality dairy products under the Gold Top name.

In the 1950s and 60s, a glass bottle of Gold Top Milk was a familiar morning sight on the family doorstep.

But for decades, Gold Top was

neglected in favour of 'healthier' lower fat milks.

The industry was suffering from the misconception that milk was a high-fat product. The reality being that whole milk actually is less than five per cent fat – far less than a packet of crisps.

But following a £250,000 marketing campaign, the next generation of Jersey and Guernsey cattle farmers have been fighting back and now Gold



Top is a popular brand in many of the leading major supermarkets, independent food retailers and farm shops throughout the UK. They're on a mission to persuade shoppers that the distinctive yellow, rich milk and cream can be part of a healthy diet – and that it can add flavour to even the most robust of breakfast cereals.

Gold Top Milk company secretary, Keith Dale, explains what it is about

QUALITY: Jersey cows grazing on fresh grass produce creamy milk for Gold Top, and left, company secretary Keith Dale







Quality Milk Producers

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Jersey and
Guernsey
cows?

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YOUR FRIENDS
AND FAMILY WITH
HELP AT TESCO



Please go to your local Tesco's and
ask 'where is Gold Top Milk?'



Gold Top Milk that makes it so special.

“Gold Top stands for quality and we believe it tastes better, being both richer and creamier in flavour and consistency than regular silver top or coloured top milks. It’s also high in protein and energy, providing valuable vitamins A, B, D and E, and, of course, calcium,” Keith explains.

“It not only tastes great in hot or cold drinks, it can also enhance many sweet and savoury dishes, whether it’s poured over breakfast cereal, whisked into a filling for a quiche, used in a creamy sauce for pasta, or transformed into a rich custard, ice cream or rice pudding.”

Keith also explains that using Gold Top Milk is becoming popular with many independent and chain coffee shops and ice-cream parlours.

“Because our milk tastes so great, it enhances the flavour of coffees and teas and also makes really delicious milkshakes, giving a boost to other people’s businesses then too.

“And because of its rich consistency, many people are realising that Gold Top makes an ideal substitute for cream in recipes, creating indulgent dishes with fewer calories.

“Gold Top is also the traditional way Jersey milk was made, with the cream at the top of the bottle. Growing up, that was the way we always had our milk, with the person who was lucky enough to open the Gold Top getting the cream first – the best bit!”

Alongside delicious milk, Gold Top also now produces butter, which is freshly churned



Jersey and Guernsey cow’s milk. It has a richer flavour and a naturally softer texture than other butters, in addition to a lovely golden colour.

And the cows that make Gold Top are just as attractive as the produce we can buy, says dairy farmer, Gold Top partner and NFU member David Shaw. He says: “They’re one of the country’s most instantly-recognisable breeds of cow and certainly one of the most attractive, with golden flanks and come-hither eyes, the Jersey is certainly an appealing bovine. The Guernsey, too, is a beautiful creature, with a delicate fawn-coloured coat. They may also have white hair mixed in with the fawn and their large dark eyes are magnified by an off-white ring.”

Indeed, Jersey and Guernsey milk has always been regarded as some of the finest available, and rightly deserving of its distinctive gold foil tops.

The Gold Top range has also reached ‘Platinum status’ as a special one-off creation, ‘Platinum Top’, was delivered directly to pop-star Justin Bieber at the SSE Hydro Arena in Glasgow where he was performing last year. Having ordered a glass of milk when playing in Manchester, Graham’s Family Dairy Farm (a licensee of Gold Top) decided to create a special delivery of Gold Top for the platinum-selling singer, delivering him five bottles of ‘Platinum Top’ milk for his next concert. And if it’s good enough for Bieber, it’s good enough for me. 🐄

● goldtopmilk.co.uk

GOLDEN TASTE: The milk from Guernsey cows is used along with Jerseys to produce Gold Top Milk



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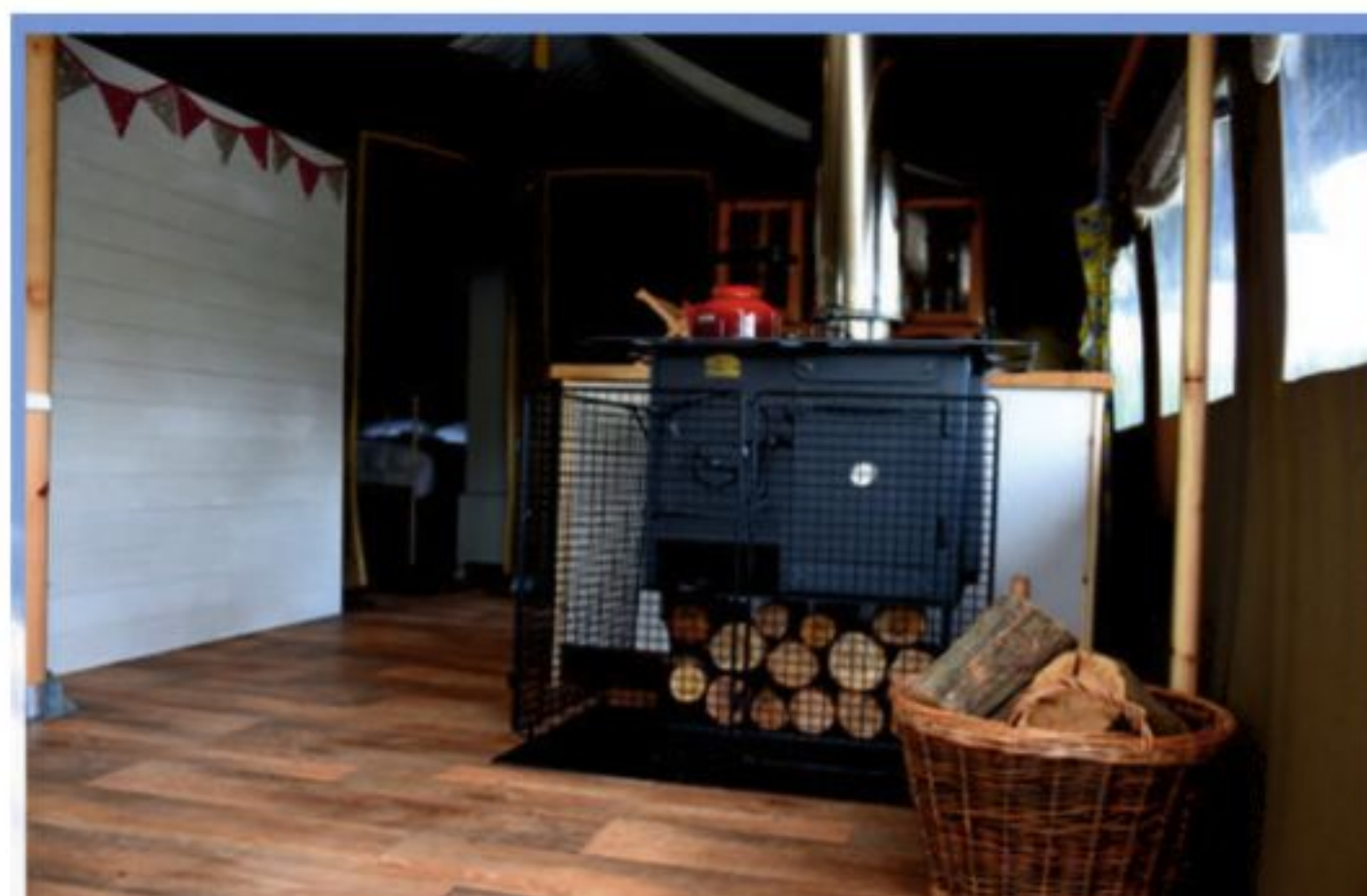


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Pictures courtesy of www.eversfieldorganic.co.uk



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Glamping uncovered

Over the past 10 years, the glamping industry has really taken off. **Emily Padfield** looks at the opportunities and pitfalls for those thinking about starting their own glamping business

FOR MANY FARMERS, landowners and smallholders, the burgeoning glamping industry offers what can seem like an attractive income stream. But take a look on Airbnb or Canopy and Stars and you'll see plenty of amazing offerings from the sublime to the outrageous. Is there room for more? I asked glamping and outdoor hospitality consultant Sarah Riley some key questions.

Q What should be the first thing to consider before going into any glamping business?

A The first question I would ask is: is this something that really suits you as an individual and your personality. Glamping is a business that sits within the service industry and it takes a particular type of person to work within it. If you're someone who wants to help people enjoy their leisure time, no matter how many obscure requests they make, then you're perfect.

Ultimately, you will be the face of your business, so you need to make sure it's going to be something you'll love, as if you don't then it will show and may become evident in customer reviews.

Q The million dollar question: what makes a successful glamping business?

A Here's the magic answer for the glamping industry: be unique, high quality and make your customers feel special – always! Do your homework and offer an experience for a certain audience then figure out where to find them, talk to them in a way that will engage them and success will follow.



A TOUCH OF CLASS: You don't have to slum it when it comes to glamping!

Q How feasible is it as a sideline to another business or career, and is it possible to run it alongside something else such as a farm?

A The great thing about glamping is that it's perfect to run alongside an existing business. It can be large or small – depending on how much time you have to run it. However, being small doesn't make it any less of a business; this makes it bespoke, which customers love.

And if you go really 'high-end' you can charge more for the service, therefore making it more lucrative for you.

Q What are the planning pitfalls that you can fall into?

A The one mistake I see regularly is businesses believing they don't need planning. So the one recommendation I make here is always look for a planning consultant with relevant experience in glamping. From experience, if you don't already know about the planning process, then commission a planning consultant. A happy upshot of this is that some local authorities seem to take your application more seriously.

Q What's the most common mistake for those starting out?

A People thinking they can set up a glamping site without a robust budget or business plan. You can't get someone to stay with you for their holiday and enjoy it unless you set up something bespoke and beautiful and this takes money and planning. The next mistake is not maintaining the site properly or focusing on cleanliness – a negative for the all-important TripAdvisor review.

Q What sort of payback should a glamping business be looking for?

A This depends on a number of factors – the glamping model chosen, the accommodation, service and marketing effort and so on, but as a general rule of thumb, a return on investment can be made within two years of launch.

All About Sarah Riley



Sarah Riley is a coach, trainer and adviser supporting the outdoor hospitality industry through programmes designed to nurture new businesses launching into the glamping market. Sarah is offering Countryside magazine readers a special 10% discount from all her training packages. Simply add code: NFUMAG to your basket at checkout. Visit: inspiredcourses.com/glamping or inspiredcamping.com

Q The market seems to be booming, but is there a danger of too many people doing it?

A This goes back to my first point about being unique and offering an experience that's a bit different, but which fits with your customers' needs and desires. Get this right and you won't need to worry about the competition.

Q Should you offer extras? Activities, trips, freshly-made bread?

A Yes, yes and yes. However, you don't have to offer them yourself, just make sure they're available. So seek out who, in your area, offers something your ideal customer will want and negotiate a deal with them so you'll both benefit.

Q Shepherds huts, pods, tipis or tents? Or perhaps a mixture of all/some?

A Each type of accommodation has different costs, audience appeal, booking and occupation rates. For example, the percentage of time in the year it's booked out and full or empty. This needs to be chosen carefully with the business budget, location and offering in mind. My course takes you through these steps, which are too complex to go through here in full detail.





ON TREND: Glamping, or luxury camping, is seeing strong growth in the UK



Q Marketing: do you put your eggs into one basket with the likes of a booking agent (like Canopy and Stars) or try to do it yourself?

A This can change regularly from launch through to 10 years down the line. What you definitely need in place is a strategy to get return visitors, as evidence shows it costs seven times less to get customers to return to you than to attract new customers, and as booking agents can charge a fee of 20% for each booking, you can see why.

It's important to have your own website and booking facility to allow customers to come direct to you, even if you are using a booking agent.

Q Twitter, facebook and the web: is it essential that you try to engage, or not?

A Yes, definitely! A glamping business that doesn't use social media is missing out on an essential marketing tool that's free. All it requires is a bit of skill and time to build the right following.

I also offer training in this area as, in my opinion, and from experience, it's one of the best places to generate a following, bookings and repeat visitors.



Case study

Hill Farm Shepherds Huts, Warwickshire

Angela Darbishire has been offering bed and breakfast on the family's sheep and arable farm for the past 17 years, and has used an original shepherd's hut as a quirky extra bedroom for the past 10 or so. But two years ago the family decided to offer something completely different, a self-contained shepherd's hut in a tucked-away area of the farm for guests to get away from it all. Guests have their own kitchen, shower and ecoloo, too.

They advertise on Alistair Sawday's Canopy and Stars and had the shepherds hut made for them. "Although we had the structure made, I did all the interior, which is not only a huge amount of fun but it also enables you to put your own stamp on things," explains Angela.

"It's definitely a lot of fun offering something like glamping as guests love it, but it's also a lot of work."

But there are a lot of options out there, she adds, so you have to make sure you do offer your own unique style. And not being located in a particularly busy tourist area also has a huge factor.

"Although we do have Stratford-upon-Avon nearby and the Cotswolds within an hour, we're not in the West Country, but we do benefit from not being that far from London or other major cities."

It also costs a lot of money to set up something high-end like this, she adds. "In comparison with other investments it's not the most lucrative and it's definitely not going to be something you profit massively from on this scale, it's more of an add-on which works on our farm."

The past two years have averaged about 50% occupancy. The site has to be accessible, too, adds Angela. "Not only for the guests, but also for you to take laundry, cleaning and gardening equipment to regularly."

It's also very different from bed and breakfast, as after the guests have checked in, that's it other than occasional interaction.

Son Hugh, who deals with the day-to-day running of the farm, is also thinking of offering canvas tents with his fiancé Emily. "But I would add that you have to be careful in your own area not to over-saturate the market and to offer something different."

● stayathillfarm.co.uk



What's out there...



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● landpod.co.uk



Good Guest sleeping bags

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● thegoodguest.com



Tub-Tub hot tub

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● topstak.co.uk



Tsavo safari tent

Perhaps more what you would expect in the Masai Mara than in rural England, safari tents are just as much at home here in the UK as in Africa, says Boldscan. The award-winning Tsavo large decked safari tent can house a six-person family or group with different sleeping areas and bespoke kitchen and living areas.

● boldscan.co.uk



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● snoozeboxhotel.co.uk



Blackdown Shepherd Huts

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● blackdownshepherdhuts.co.uk

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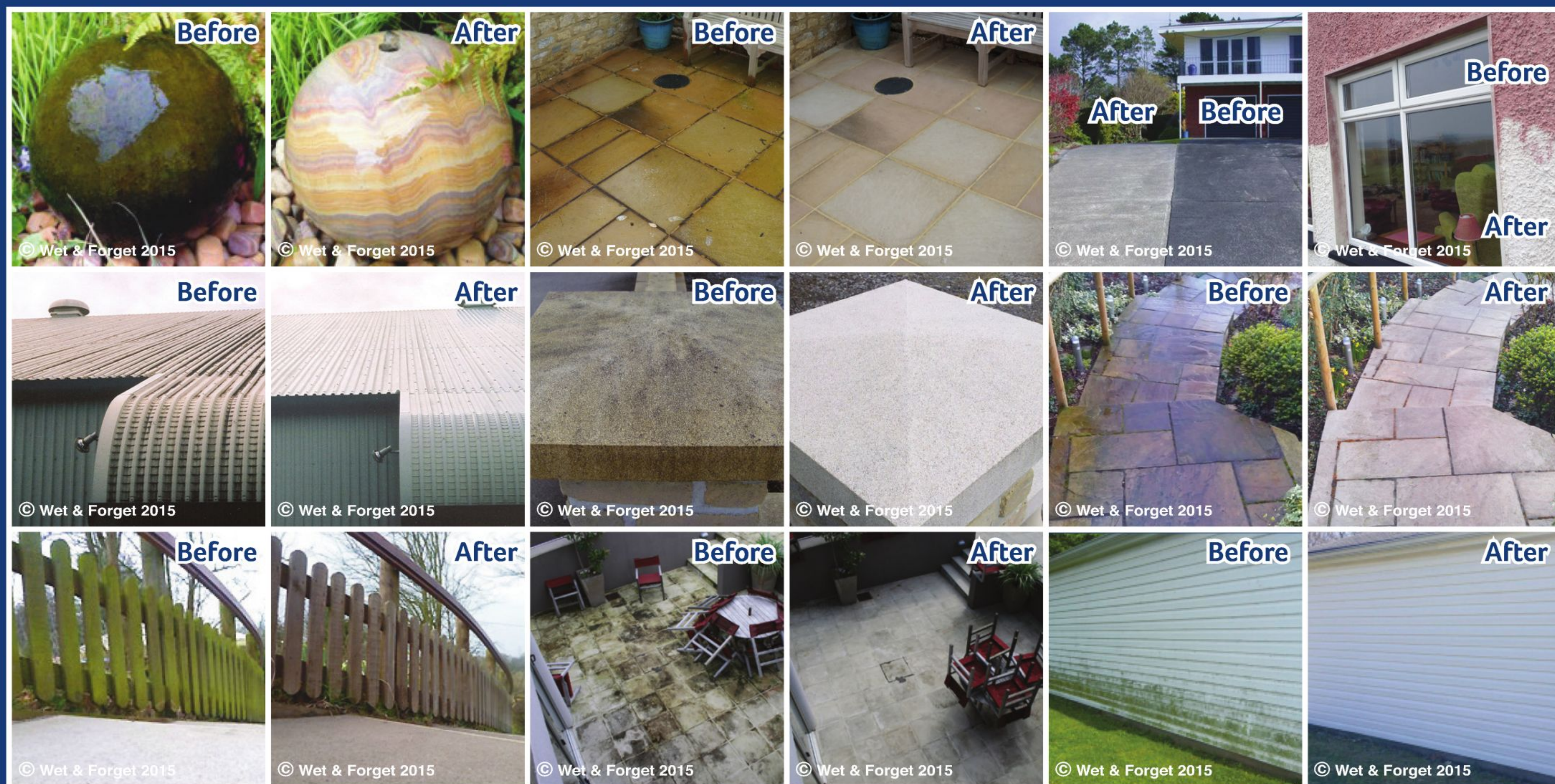
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**To enter, send your name, address, postcode and membership number on separate postcards for each competition to:
Competitions, NFU Countryside, Agriculture House, Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire, CV8 2TZ**



**Or you can enter online via competitions and offers at:
countrysideonline.co.uk**

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: Closing date for competitions unless otherwise stated is 6 March 2017. The promoter is the National Farmers Union (the NFU) Agriculture House, Stoneleigh Park, Stoneleigh, Warwickshire, CV8 2TZ. The promotion is open to all residents of the UK, including the Channel Islands, aged 18 years or older, except the Promoter's employees or contractors and anyone connected with the promotion or their direct family members. Some offers are for members only and are only open to full NFU Countryside members. By entering the promotion, the participants agree to be bound by these terms and conditions. The NFU cannot acknowledge receipt of entry and no entries will be returned. The Promoter's decision as to the winner is final. Only one entry will be permitted per person, regardless of method of entry. Bulk entries made by third parties will not be permitted. The winner(s) will be notified within 7 days of the close of the promotion by post/telephone/email. There is no cash alternative and the prize will not be transferable. Prizes must be taken as stated and cannot be deferred. The Promoter reserves the right to substitute the prize with one of the same or greater value. The Promoter excludes liability to the full extent permitted by law for any loss, damage or injury occurring to the participant arising from his or her entry into the promotion or occurring to the winner(s) arising from his or her acceptance of a prize. For full NFU Countryside terms and conditions, visit countrysideonline.co.uk/competitions.

Taste the best of the South West!



Win a two-night hotel stay and tickets to the Exeter Festival of South West Food and Drink!

WE'VE TEAMED UP with the Exeter Festival of South West Food & Drink and the Mercure Exeter Rougemont Hotel, member of devonhotels.com, to offer one lucky reader and guest a fabulous foodie escape. This includes tickets to the festival on Sunday 30 April and Monday 1 May and a complimentary two nights' stay, including breakfast in the heart of Exeter.

Returning to the dramatic Exeter Castle Courtyard and pretty Northernhay Gardens in the very heart of the city of Exeter, the 14th Exeter Festival of South West Food & Drink will kick off at 6.30pm on Friday 28 April with the first of three nights of live music and delectable food and drinks.

From Saturday 29 April to Bank Holiday Monday 1 May, daytime events include demos from top chefs including festival co-founder Michael Caines, workshops and children's activities. More than 100 producers from the region will be found in the food and drink marquees in Northernhay Gardens, selling a range of mouth-watering products.

The four-star Mercure Exeter Rougemont Hotel, which has recently enjoyed a £2.1 million refurbishment, is an elegant Victorian building and is just a minute's walk from the Exeter Festival of South West Food & Drink.

The winner and guest will receive entry to enjoy the festival by day and the After Dark Music Festival on Sunday before heading back to the Mercure Exeter Rougemont Hotel. On Monday, the winner can return to the festival to enjoy more live music, demonstrations and tasty street food in the day, before enjoying a second night at the hotel.



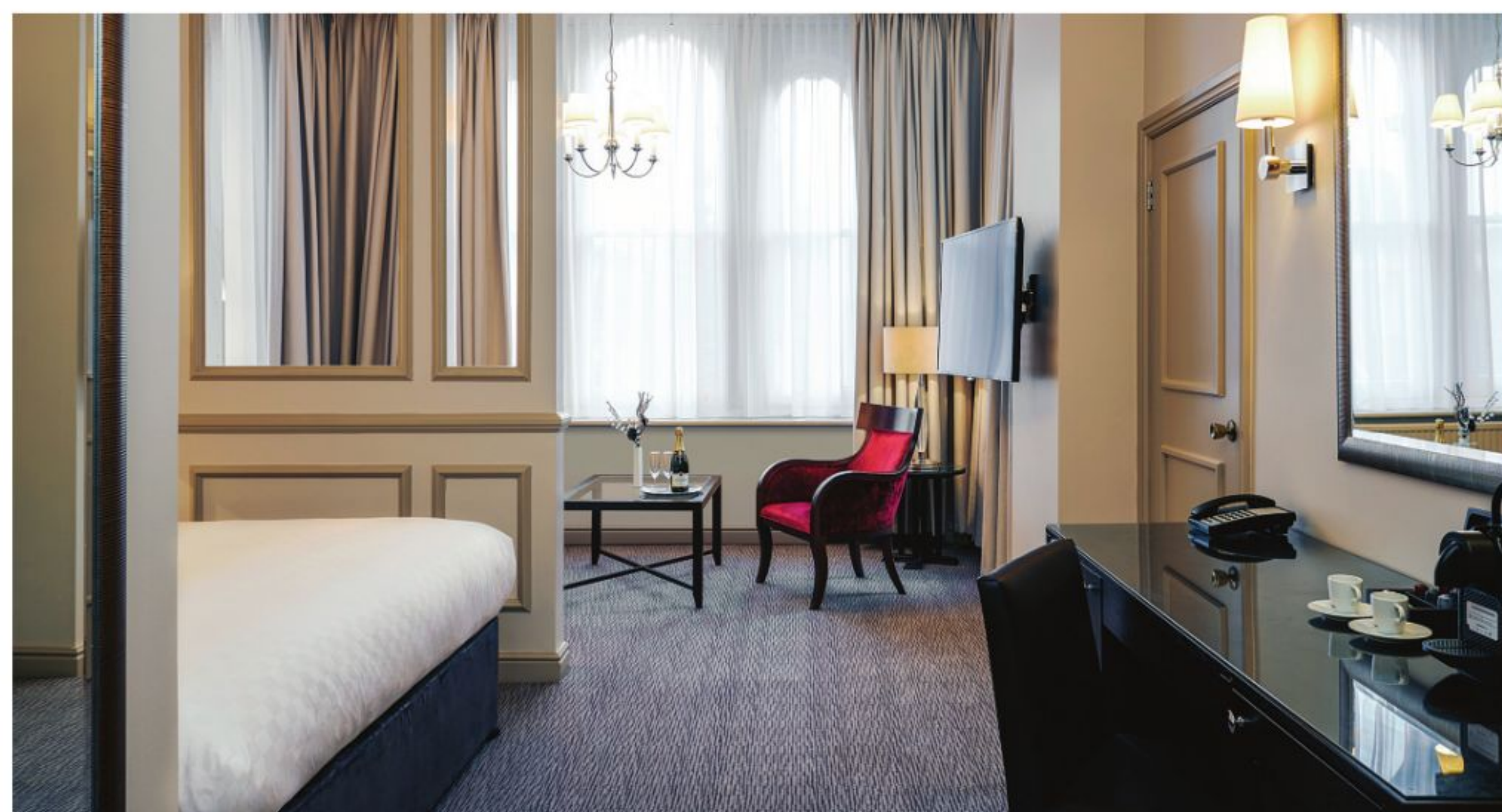
How to enter

For your chance to win this fantastic prize, simply send your full details to Exeter Festival of South West Food & Drink Competition, Countryside magazine c/o Heather Lewis, NFU HQ, Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire CV8 2TZ or email heather.lewis@nfu.org.uk. Closing date is 6 March 2017.

Further information

- exeterfoodanddrinkfestival.co.uk
- mercure.com/gb/united-kingdom/index.shtml
- accorhotels.com/gb/united-kingdom/index.shtml
- devonhotels.com

Terms & Conditions: Closing date 6 March 2017. Entry for two people on Sunday 30 April and Monday 1 May 2017 to the Exeter Festival of South West Food & Drink. Festival tickets include access to After Dark Music Festival on Sunday 30 April 2017. Excludes VIP or ticketed features. Two-night stay with breakfast at Mercure Exeter Rougemont Hotel to be taken on Sunday 30 April and Monday 1 May 2017. Transport is not included. Open to residents of the UK aged over 18. Prize is non-transferable or amendable. No cash alternative. Additional costs incurred are payable by the winner.



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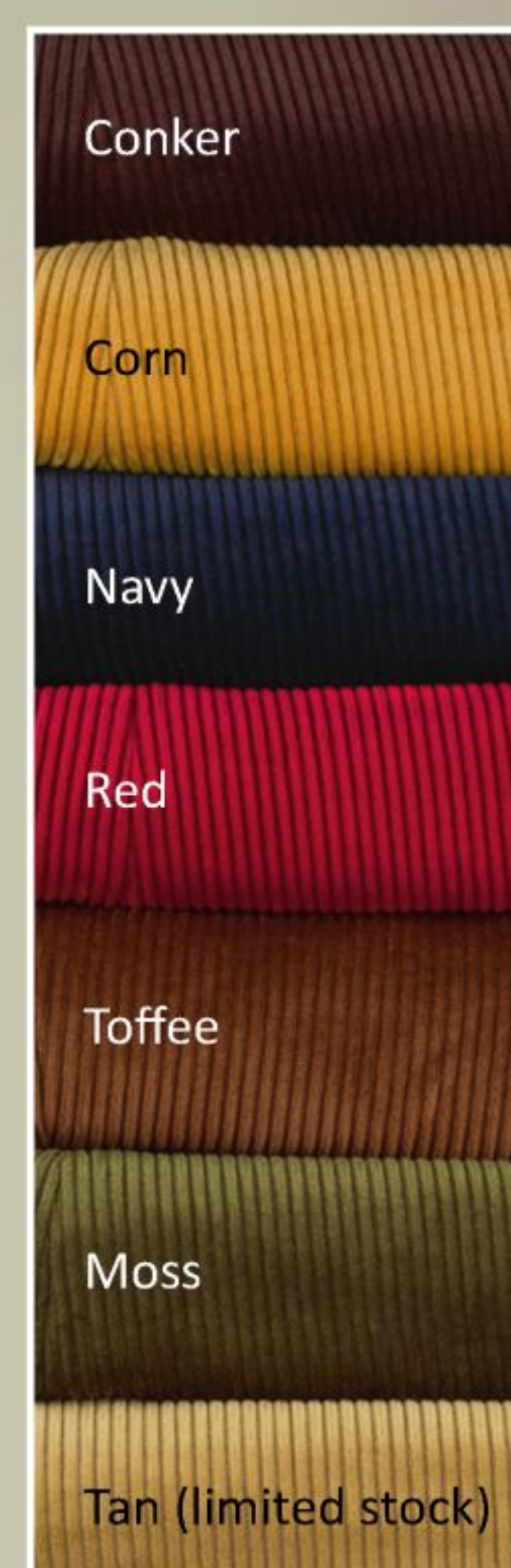


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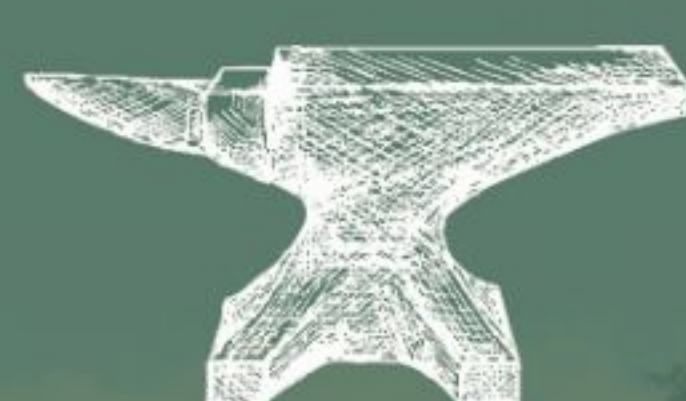
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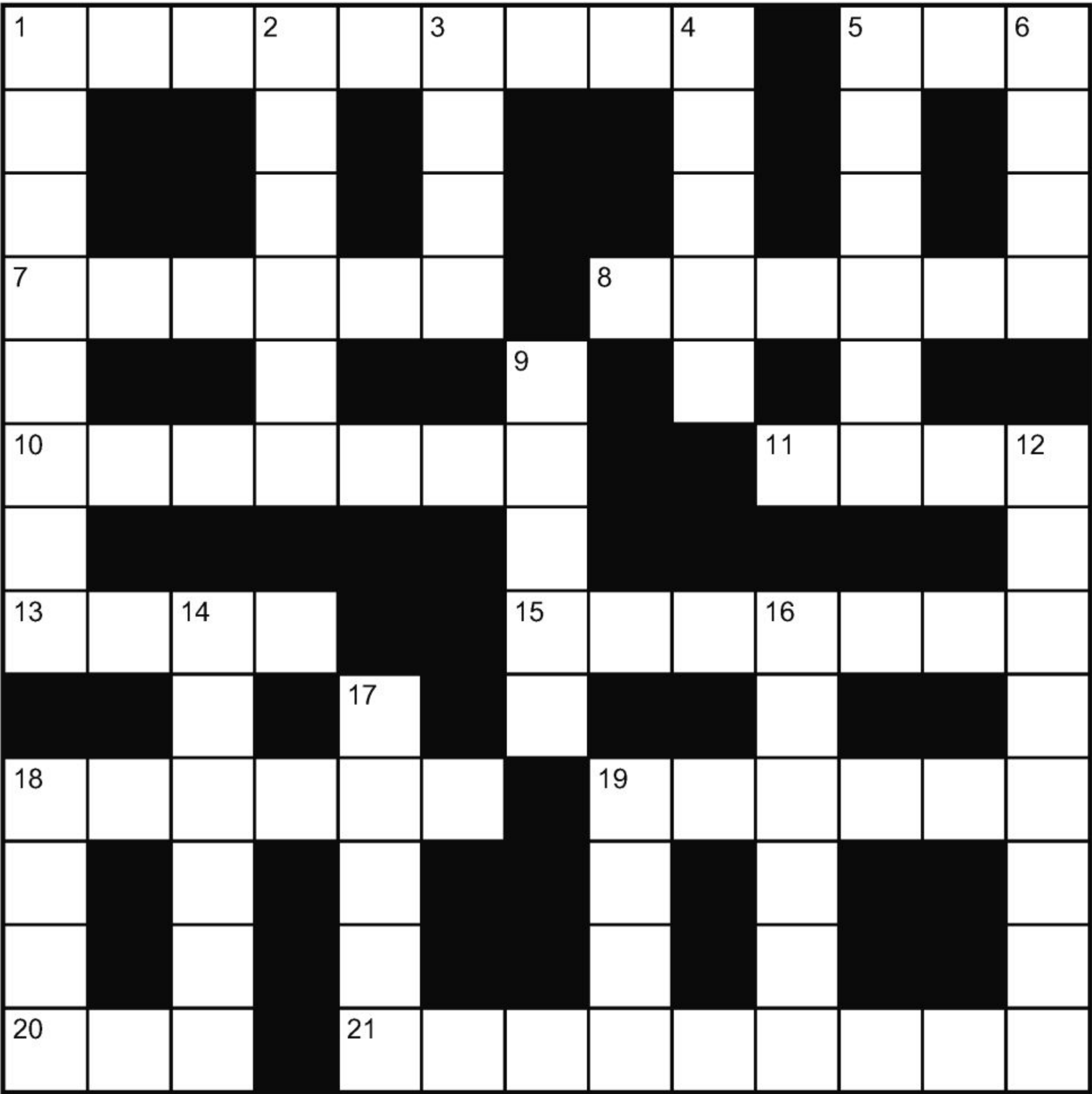


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The Countryside puzzler



The winner of this month's crossword will receive these lovely Foxy polo shirts from Timothy Foxx: one for him and one for her.

Perfect for summer, this luxurious Ladies Wild Foxx slim-fit country polo shirt in turquoise and navy has some wonderful



detailing; navy side panels which create a slimming effect, white cuffs, and a soft collar.

The men's shirt Wild Foxx country polo shirt is available in sage green, white and royal blue.

● The polo shirts retail at £42 each and for more information, visit: timothyfoxx.co.uk

For your chance to win this lovely prize, send your completed crossword and contact details by 6 March 2017 to Countryside Crossword,

NFU HQ, Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire CV8 2TZ and we'll print the answer next month.

● The winner of the Crossword for January is: Anne Moore from Cornwall

ACROSS

- 1** Mixture of vegetables or fruit cut into small pieces (9)
5 An uncastrated male sheep (3)
7 US state where the average size of a ranch is 3,500 acres (6)
8 Plant disease, typically one caused by fungi such as mildews and rusts (6)
10 MP for South Northamptonshire appointed Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in July 2016 (7)
11 Destructive insect or other animal that attacks crops and livestock (4)
13 See 19 down
15 Orange-like fruit related to the citrus (7)
18 Tract of grassland, especially one used for hay (6)

- 19** Landlocked country in East Africa whose most important cash crop since the 1980s has been coffee (6)
20 Decompose by the action of bacteria and fungi (3)
21 Large area containing pens and sheds in which farm animals are kept and sorted (9)

DOWN

- 1** Tree or shrub with large, typically creamy-pink or white, waxy flowers (8)
2 King ___, potato variety that is predominantly white skinned with pink colouration (6)
3 Flowering plant valued for its edible seed pods sometimes known as ladies' fingers or gumbo (4)

- 4** Durham ___, reliable spring cabbage (5)
5 Fleshy, movable, muscular organ of an animal such as a cow, used as food (6)
6 Skin of an animal with fur, wool, or hair still on it (4)
9 ___ bacon, potato crisp flavour (5)
12 Four-footed animal (8)
14 Deer with a boring lifestyle that never changes perhaps! (2,1,3)
16 Animal pursued by a hunter, predatory animal or bird of prey (6)
17 Parts of a plant that attach it to the ground or to a support (5)
18 Area of open uncultivated upland, typically covered with heather (4)
19 and 13 across. Main excretory product in birds, reptiles, and insects (4,4)

Last month's answers



CONGRATULATIONS TO:



Raisthorpe Gin winners are: Anna Milner of Dorset, E Cook of Warwickshire, Barbara Simpson of Selby, Jill McWhirter of Cumbria, Miss R Anderson of Hampshire, Mr J Warrington of East Sussex, Herbert Daybell of Nottingham, Robin Symington of East Sussex, Mr DJ Brundrett of Shropshire, John Pickering of Cheshire, Brenda Dalton of Lancashire,

Penny Woodyer of Cumbria, Eric Karas of London, Peter Welsh of Essex

Winner of the PetSafe Bundle is: Mr P Humphrey of Atherstone

The Present Finder Gift Basket winner is: Mr M R Harris of Staffordshire

Hiho Silver winner is: Ami Tilston of Flintshire

Grub Wellies winners are: Sally Blackwell of Stockport, Mr Waugh of Cumbria, Mrs Abley of Herefordshire

Mary Ann Rogers Print winner is: Mr ND Milson of Rutland

Winner of the John Arbon socks is: Mrs A Brooks of Yeovil

PANCAKE RACE

The listed items that might find their way into a pancake have been hidden – up, down, across, diagonally, back and forth – in our wordsearch grid. Find them all to discover the name of an occasion for their use (6,7).

A	B	U	T	T	E	R	S	H	M	R
J	L	O	V	S	N	I	S	I	A	R
A	U	L	P	U	R	Y	S	S	S	E
M	E	E	I	C	R	E	A	M	C	T
T	B	H	G	N	U	N	L	E	A	S
R	E	S	O	G	A	D	T	P	R	U
U	R	A	Y	N	S	V	A	K	P	G
H	R	W	A	T	E	R	O	L	O	A
G	I	B	R	U	M	Y	C	I	N	R
O	E	C	I	U	J	N	O	M	E	L
Y	S	F	L	O	U	R	C	R	Y	E

- APPLE

BANANAS

BLUEBERRIES

BUTTER

COCOA

CREAM

EGGS

FLOUR
- HONEY

JAM

LEMON JUICE

MASCARPONE

MILK

RAISINS

RUM

RYE
- SALT

SUGAR

SYRUP

VANILLA

WATER

YOGHURT



DID YOU KNOW?

The month of March is named after Mars, the Roman god of war, as this was the month that military campaigning got under way after the winter. Before Julius Caesar’s calendar reforms, March was also the first month of the year.

Brown hares are often seen ‘boxing’ at this time of the year, which is where the phrase, ‘mad as a March hare’ comes from. It used to be thought that it was males battling each other, but it’s actually females fighting off unwanted advances from males. We also know now that hares exhibit this behaviour at other times of the year, but because over winter they are rather docile, when they spring into action in March, it looks like they have suddenly gone ‘mad’.



One of the first trees to flower in the spring is the blackthorn. Often confused with the hawthorn, the flowers of the blackthorn appear before the leaves and the spines have buds along their lengths, while on the hawthorn the flowers emerge from the same point as the bud. The blackthorn can live for up to 100 years and its wood has been used for making walking and riding sticks and used to be the traditional wood for Irish shillelaghs.

Most otters in Britain breed in spring and will normally give birth to two or three cubs. The cubs are blind until four or five weeks old, but by 10 weeks they are able to swim. They are not able to live independently until around 13-15 months old. Until then, they are looked after only by their mother. Otters have been known to live up to 10 years, but most in the wild do not reach the age of five.

MAMA MIA!

1. In the UK, Mothering Sunday falls on which Sunday in Lent?

2. “If I were damned of body and soul, I know whose prayers would make me whole, Mother o’ mine, O mother o’ mine”- which late Victorian poet penned those lines?

3. ‘Dia de la madre’ is Mother’s Day in which language?

4. Canonised in 2016, the nun and missionary Mother Teresa was born in which European country?

5. Layered with marzipan, which type of fruit cake is traditionally associated with Mothering Sunday?

6. Commemorated by a track on The White Album, Julia was the mother of which British recording artist?

7. The efforts of 20th century social activist Ann Jarvis were instrumental in establishing Mother’s Day as a national holiday in which country?

8. Who is the mother of the Italian-born actress, Isabella Rossellini?
-

1. The fourth Sunday, 2. Rudyard Kipling 3. Spanish, 4. Albania, 5. Simnel cake, 6 John Lennon, 7. USA, 8. Ingrid Bergman. WORDSEARCH: Shrove Tuesday

ANSWERS



LETTERS

Is this familiar to you?

I emptied the pockets of my husband's coat ready for the washing machine, and, as usual, the pockets were full. Having removed the bits of twig, grain, crumbed sugar cube and small debris, I was left with some larger items: baler twine, carrots, pocket knife and an egg.

I thought I would do the same with my jacket pocket and my contents were: tissue, dog biscuits, box of matches, leaf, several pegs and one (not two) gloves!

Is this familiar to any other Countryside readers?

Sally & Dave Hiams

By email

Editor replies: So there's a challenge! What weird and wonderful objects lurk in your pockets? Send us your pictures and we'll print the finest!



**LETTER
OF THE
MONTH!**

Second-hand knowledge

I quite enjoy the Malcolm Bates 'Test it' section of your magazine, but seem to find it's based principally on new equipment. A look at how this new equipment is really working after a few years on the road, and around the smallholding, would be good subject matter, and I'm sure that this would be well-received.

Don Bashford
Collaton, Halwell

Editor replies: Yes, I think this is a good idea.

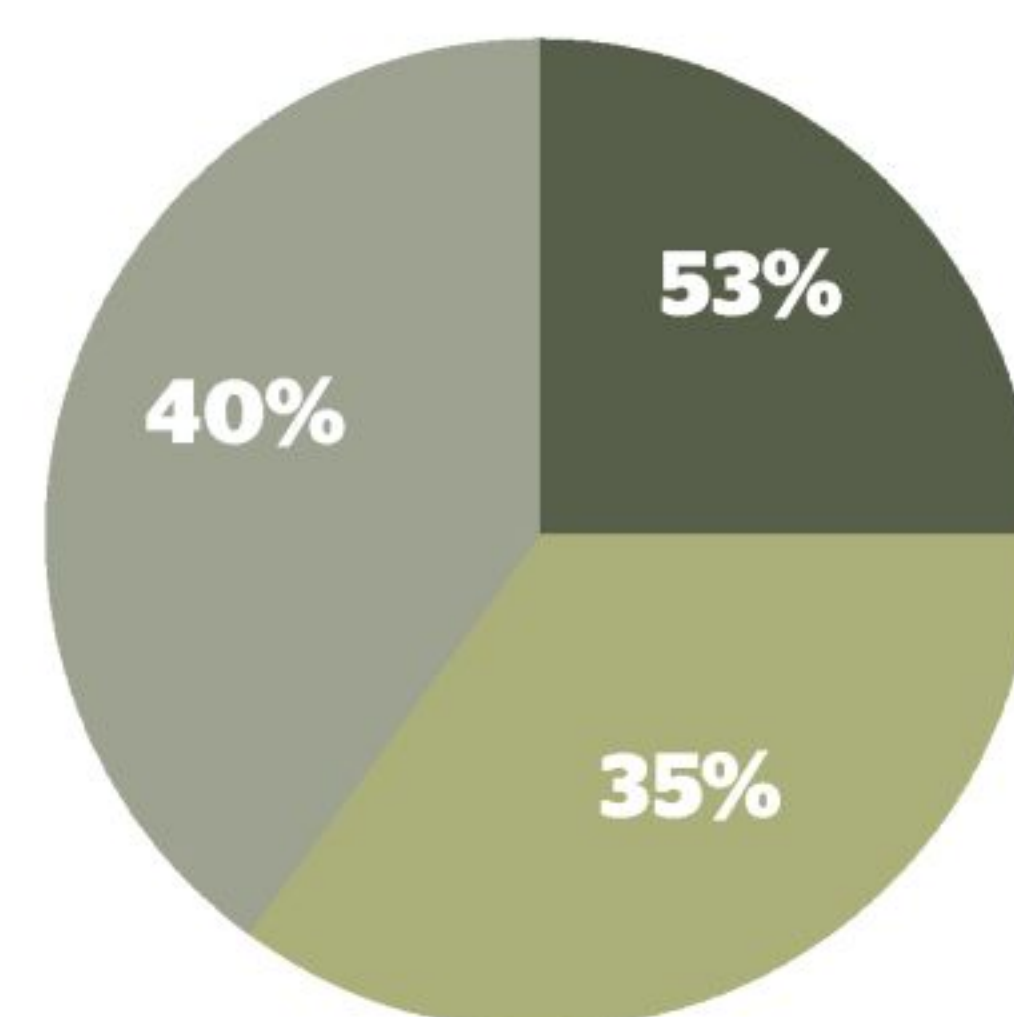


POLL-TO-POLL

Here's an example of one of our latest Twitter polls!

In honour of #traveltuesday, we asked: where are you taking your 2017 holidays?

- Where's my passport?
- Staycation for me!
- What holiday?



WIN our star letter prize

The winner of our star letter will receive either a men's or a women's Glacier Extreme Waterproof Jacket, worth £59.99.

The Glacier Extreme Women's Waterproof Jacket, with its long body and breathable design, is great for everyday use in the elements. This feature-packed jacket will allow you to find your perfect fit with ease, making it a great companion on rainy dog walks and jaunts across the moors.

The Glacier Extreme Men's Waterproof Jacket is a guaranteed high performance and protective piece, designed to keep you warm, dry and comfortable in unfavourable weather.

● Don't forget that members can get a 15% discount at mountainwarehouse.com or in store by showing their membership card.





Original and the best?

Can you please do an article on the Original Dairy Shorthorn? They're in real trouble because everyone is breeding them out to other breeds, and are on the RBST critical list. It would be nice if you could bring these amazing cows to people's attention and help save the breed.

We have seven females and one bull and they're a great animal to keep; being dual purpose you can fatten the males so there's money to be had there too. The cows are easy calving and care for their calves really well if they're kept as a suckler, which is what we do.

And please don't confuse them with the 100% dairy shorthorn – it's the Original Dairy Shorthorn that I'm talking about.

Karen Genduso
By email



Broad frustration

Further to your article in the last edition I thought you would like to know about the lack of provision of broadband in my area.

I live in Little Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, and sadly we do not have broadband as we are 8km from the BT substation in Cuffley and have received no confirmation on when we will be able to get broadband – if at all. Running a rural business is both challenging and frustrating!

Terry Bambridge
Little Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire

THE COUNTRYSIDE BLOGGER



By Rebecca Fletcher

January is never the best of months when it comes to being a spaniel owner. No sooner have I got up (in the dark I might add, dear reader), then the pleading eyes and scrabbling at my legs starts.

No matter the weather, a walk is never far from a spaniel's mind. So imagine the excitement when a little flurry of snow reached us last week. A fair dusting of the white stuff in the garden was enough to send at least one of two spaniels into a frenzy. Well, to be honest, it doesn't take much. However, this was something far more exciting than normal and Monty and Dora sat transfixed at the kitchen window as snowflakes hit the window, turning the garden white within half an hour.

Keen to make the most of it before it all thawed, all of us, small children and dogs, raced out in the dark to play. Silly games and frenetic skidding in snow followed, along with a handful of snowball-sized missiles reaching intended squealing targets. Having never seen snow before, Dora bounced about and was beside herself eating huge lumps of ice as the temperature dropped.

As for Monty, once he had decided that snow was nothing new to him, he spent the first 10 minutes sitting by my leg practically rolling his eyes at the idiot smaller spaniel trying to catch snowflakes and eat them. Joining in the fun briefly, he determined that the icing on the lawn was not all that edible after Dora had sloshed through it and opted to go back inside to steal the prime spot by the Everhot like a sulky teenager.

I should have guessed. He's far too sensible to dash after anything that doesn't have feathers and he hates getting his feet wet. Honestly, I ask you dear reader! When we finally returned to the kitchen ready to thaw out, thankfully he did decide to share his spot. All part of his cunning plan no doubt, dear reader. He'll do anything to hog the place nearest the warmth.

● For more rural blogs, go to: countrysideonline.co.uk



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STABLES





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Andy is a writer who lives in Shropshire where he has bred poultry for many years. He also runs the website: chickenstreet.co.uk

“Ask Andy”

“I’d like to ‘work’ my flock of chickens to make them more productive, perhaps by managing the light conditions. What strategy would you suggest?”

Placing 18-20-week-old layer breed pullets under 14-16 hours of light per day will bring them into production in about two weeks, no matter what the season of the year. In addition, keeping the lights on a long-day schedule will keep them laying through the autumn and winter months. Eventually, the birds will need to moult, which can easily be accomplished during their second winter. This is done simply by removing any artificial lighting and leaving them with natural short-day photoperiods, starting in about mid-November and continuing through the end of December. This period of short days (less than 12 hours) will give the hens plenty of time to moult and rejuvenate their egg production. Restoring long days of 16 hours of light (and even a little more as they are older now) from January onwards will restore their egg production.

Did you know?

The bright surface gloss seen on black plumage is known as sheen whereas in other plumage colours it’s known as lustre. This buffed look of the plumage can often be achieved through rubbing the bird down prior to penning with a silk cloth or material similar to that used for cleaning glass and spectacles.



Feathered focus

Breed Name: Cochin

Region of origin: Asia

Profile: Originally known as the Shanghai, the Cochin reached the shores of the Western world from China in the 1850s. It was hailed for its table qualities and laying capability initially, but over time the focus on its profuse plumage and exhibition potential has meant these utility qualities have fallen by the way. Soft textured fluffy feathering coupled with its short feathered legs, low carriage and bulky appearance give the bird a huge presence.

Behaviour and

upkeep: As would befit a breed of this look, the Cochin is a very placid and soft bird. It’s easy to tame and shows little desire to get off the ground. Housing does need to be appropriately proportioned for their size, plus they don’t cope well in muddy conditions. As such, dry sheltered areas are required, whether free ranging or kept in a fixed run. Within the house perches should not be set too high to enable the bird to

alight without causing leg damage. The hens are good layers and regularly go broody, making reliable mothers.

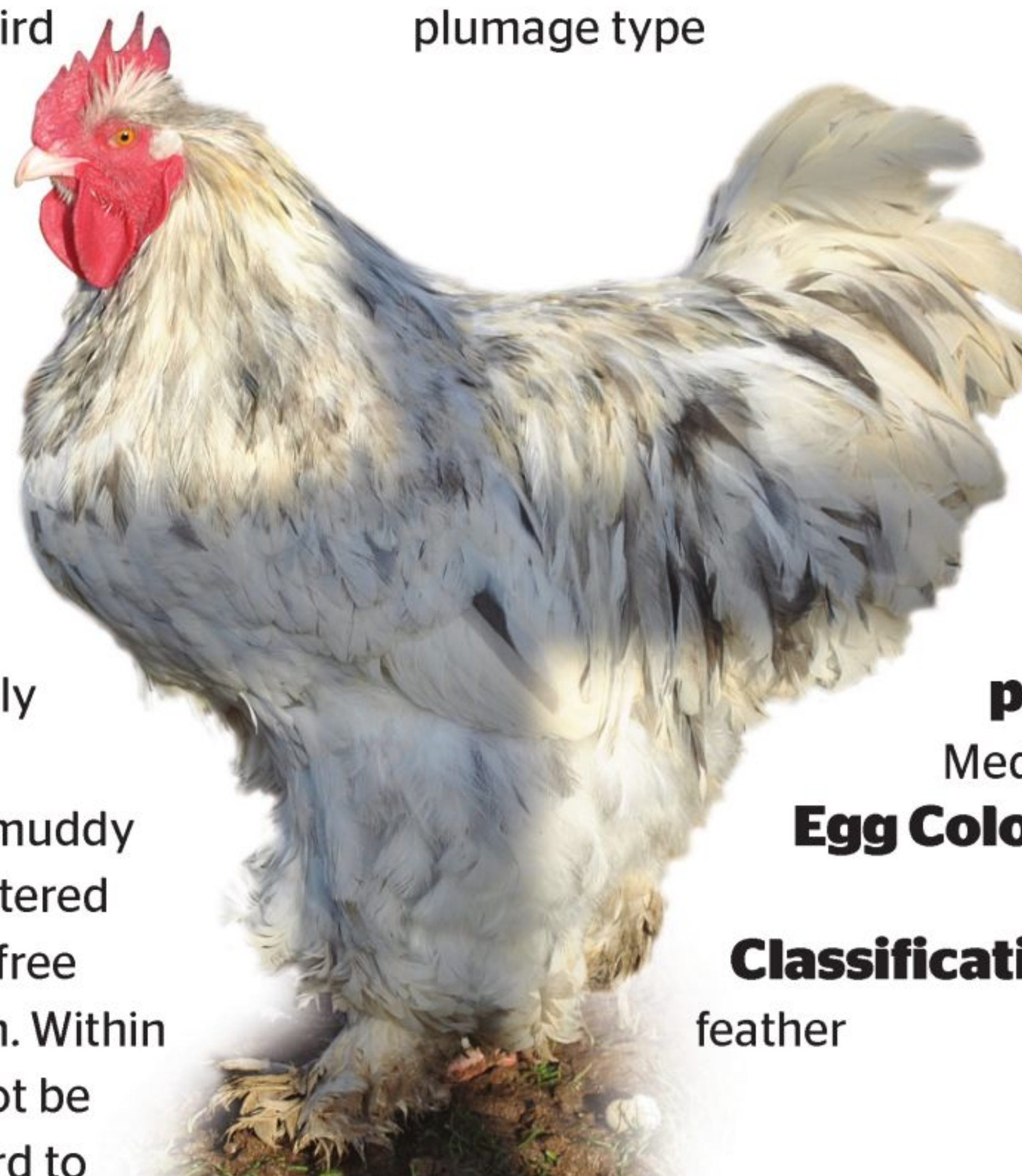
Plumage/colours: Black, Blue, Buff, White, Cuckoo, Partridge, Splash

Particulars:

Eyes: Bright red, dark red or pearl depending on plumage type

Comb: Single, small, evenly serrated

Feet & legs: Feathered, colour dependent on plumage type



Weights:

Cock: 10-13lb (4.55-5.90kg)

Hen: 9-11lb (4.10-5.00kg)

Egg production:

Medium

Egg Colour: Tinted

Classification: Heavy; Soft feather

Chicken Nugget

Hatching season is now upon us and if you decide to try your hand at hatching this year then the first rule of thumb is ‘sit on your hands’ during the process. Many folks find their first venture into incubator hatching doesn’t quite turn out as it should. Even if the eggs are fertile and candle well, the hatch rate is not quite the bundle of fluff that was expected. More often than not it’s the fault of the operator and not that of the eggs or the chicks.

Artificial incubation isn’t a dark art, but it equally, it isn’t an exact science. The bottom line is you’re trying to get the incubator to the right conditions to enable the embryo



to develop fully and the egg to lose 15% of its mass over the designated incubation period (21 days in chickens).

Slight fluctuations in those conditions can result in earlier or later hatches and this is where, as a first timer, you can start to get anxious. It starts with checking the incubator, initially this is looking through the window, next its opening the machine itself (bang goes the optimum conditions when you do this and it will take time for those conditions to return).

Don’t. Sit on your hands or, better still, go away and do something less destructive. Let nature take its course, some chicks hatch quickly, others slowly, and ducks are downright lazy; rarely though does your intervention help.

**Cut out
& keep
POSTER**



Keep your birds safe

Avian Influenza (bird flu) is a notifiable poultry disease.
To prevent it spreading, government has put in place a Prevention Zone
(including a housing order) that applies to ALL poultry.



HOUSE YOUR BIRDS
or at least separate them
from wild birds



DETER WILD BIRDS
Give your birds more space
by using a fine mesh to
create a run



FEED AND WATER
your birds in an area
which wild birds
can't access



OCCUPY YOUR BIRDS
by giving them something
to peck and play with like a
straw bale or cardboard



MITES, WORMS ETC.
Keep an eye out
and treat if necessary



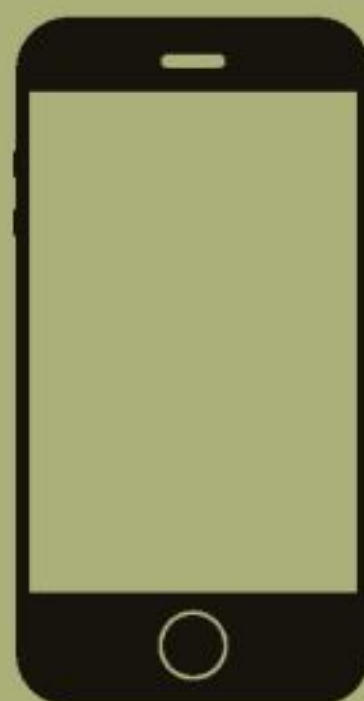
RODENT CONTROL
is essential



WATER SOURCES
Avoid sharing with
wild birds



KEEP YOURSELF CLEAN
boots, clothes, hands etc



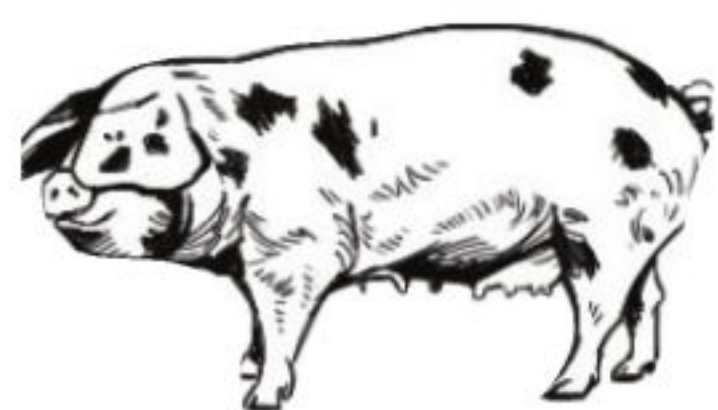
CALL YOUR VET
if you're worried about the
health or welfare of your birds



NON-COMPLIANCE
may be an offence

More information on Avian Influenza can be found at: nfuonline.com/Alhub or
read Andy Cawthray's blog for the backyard keeper at: countrysideonline.com





British rare breeds

Breed: Lincoln Longwool sheep

A large dual-purpose sheep, bred to carry a heavy, lanolin-rich wool combined with a substantial mutton yield, the Lincoln Longwool is the largest of the native British breeds. Once in great demand, both at home and abroad, the breed fell out of fashion and dwindled in numbers during the second half of the 20th century, reaching the brink of extinction in the 1970s. However, breed promotion efforts since the 1980s have brought the Lincoln Longwool back to safer numbers, although it's still officially 'at risk'.

Breed history: The original Lincoln Longwool was first identified in the 1700s, and during the 1750s, the agricultural pioneer Robert Bakewell used the Lincoln Longwool as a foundation stock for his famous breeding programme, so almost every 'improved' longwool breed in the world can claim the Lincoln Longwool in its parentage.

The breed declined through the 20th century, reaching an all-time low by the 1970s, largely due to the advent of manmade fibres. Only the continuation of a handful of heritage, family flocks prevented the breed from dying out altogether.

Breed promotion efforts paid off, and the Rare Breeds Survival Trust has recently moved the Lincoln Longhorn from category 3 (vulnerable) to category 4 (at risk), but there are still fewer than 1,000 breeding ewes in the country today.

Characteristics: A hardy breed, suited to dry, cold conditions and well adapted to living outside, the Lincoln Longwool is a strong, disease-resistant sheep. They're known for being docile and loving, with a mild, sweet-natured temperament. Their 300 years of

domestication have made them easy to handle and, unlike many other breeds, they can be trained to come when they're called.

Breed

appearance:

As the largest of the native breeds of sheep, the Lincoln Longwool is a heavy animal.

Mature rams weigh from 250lb to 350lb and mature ewes range in weight from 200lbs to 250lb. Similar in appearance to the Leicester Longwool, the Lincoln has a polled (horned) head, woolly legs and a long, lustrous fleece, which is carried in heavy locks that twist to a spiral at the end.

What the experts say: Louise Fairburn is the chairman of the Lincoln Longwool Sheep Breeders' Association, and has kept a flock for more than 12 years.

She says: "I have found Lincoln Longwools to be an extremely endearing breed, brimming with character and radiating historical importance.

"The size of a Lincoln is often a daunting prospect for the would-be keeper, however, hundreds of years of domestication has made them easy to handle. They're hardy, have strong maternal instincts and have developed a resistance to foot rot, making them a very appealing choice for the modern-day shepherd."



**Prospects
for the
future:
7/10**

Societies

lincolnlongwools.co.uk

Further information

rbst.org.uk

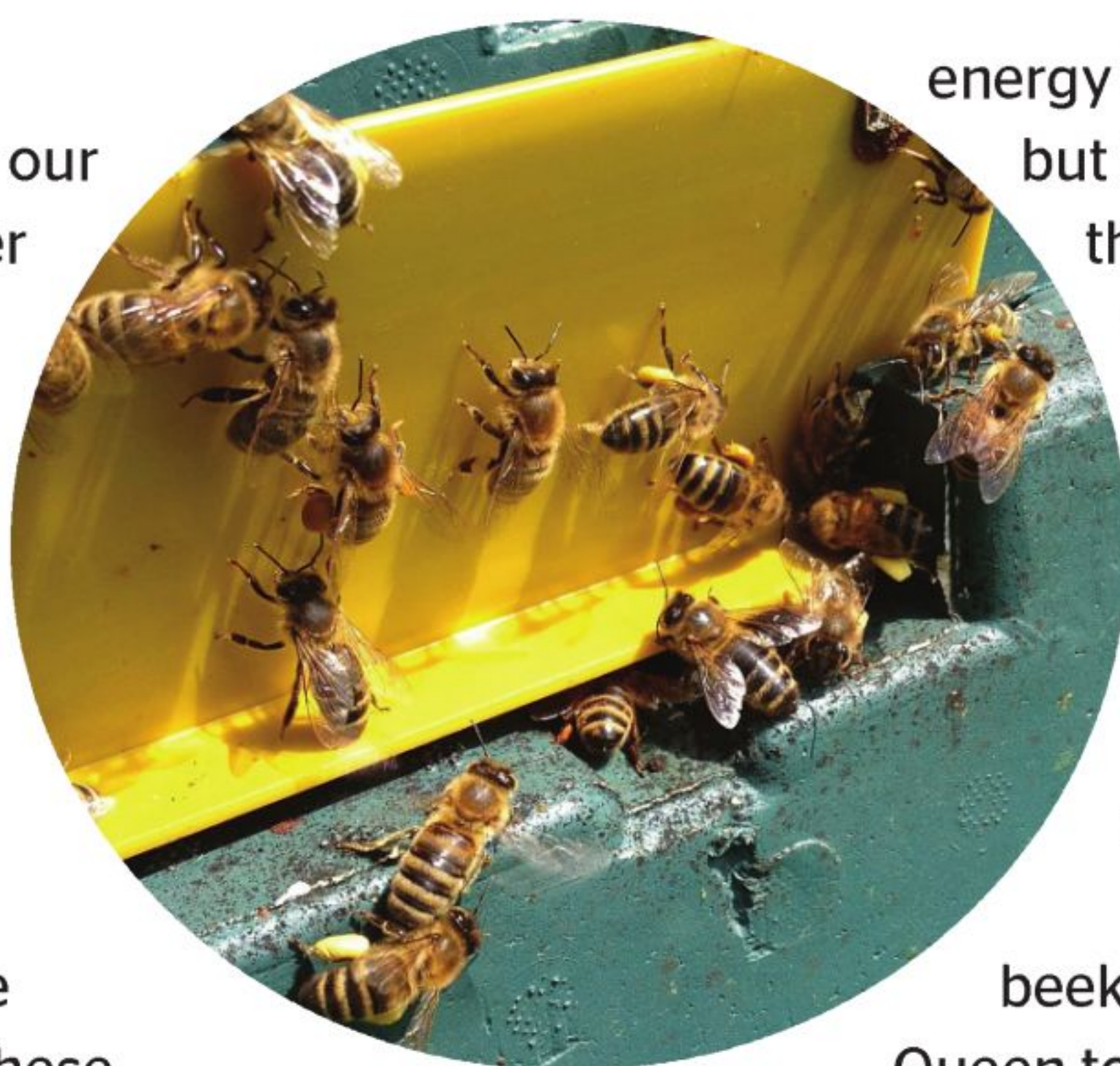


Buzz from the Beehive

This is an anxious time of year for us beekeepers as we wait to see whether our colonies have come through the winter intact. We can't risk harming the bees by opening the hive in temperatures less than 12C, so we need to look at external signs such as seeing worker bees returning to the hive with loads of pollen on their back legs.

These returning bees are the first generation of the new year and have been raised by their older "winter" bee sisters born in late autumn last year. These winter bees are almost a different caste, being physically bigger with large fat bodies from which they can internally produce brood food needed to raise the new generation laid as eggs in late January onwards.

Although they are able to fly, winter bees don't waste



energy foraging as there is nothing to collect, but largely stay in the hive apart from the occasional poo flight every few weeks. Their lifespan is around six months and they have a critical role in sustaining the colony using the stored honey gathered last summer to feed the Queen and themselves through until the new generation take over in spring.

Inbound pollen is good news for beekeepers. Its presence will stimulate the Queen to lay more eggs and enables the newly-emerged house bees to produce brood food directly from the collected pollen to feed a rapidly growing population of larvae before their winter sisters die, having done all that is required to keep their colony alive for another season.



Simon Cavill has been keeping bees in Hampshire for more than 10 years. In 2008, he set up a business called 'Bee Good' with his wife Caroline, specialising in natural skincare products using honey and beeswax. More at: beegood.co.uk



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The Dogfather

When prevention is better than cure

This month's column comes with a warning: ordinarily we might suggest you enjoy a cup of tea and biscuits when you sit down with Countryside, but this time I think it's best that you're not eating, and certainly not your breakfast. This month, dear reader, I've decided that for the first time ever it's time I wrote about dog poo. And more specifically, dogs eating dog poo. Or 'coprophagia' to use the technical term.

Still with us? Congratulations! The truth is that some dogs eat poo. It's the way of the world. Rabbit and sheep droppings seem to be a particular favourite (delicious, apparently), but occasionally dog poo too.

To some extent it's a natural phenomenon, especially in puppies, who often grow out of it, but it can become a behavioural problem. At best it's undesirable to dog owners who often find it distressing – much to the surprise of the dogs who I'm sure can't understand why we don't like it too. There are health considerations as well, of course, both for dogs and humans.

I was contacted by a client recently whose dog, a young Pointer, had taken to grabbing poo bags from her on a walk and, given half a chance, even from other dog owners too. He'd bomb around with his prize, before finally eating it. How could I fix this?

It's a complex issue. There could be something missing in his diet that he's looking for in the faeces. It can happen in cases where dogs are under-fed, but that seemed unlikely in the case of this lady who was, after all, a conscientious owner. A nutritional deficiency is possible, so a change of diet can help, although some dogs – mine included – develop this habit as a puppy

and grow out of it, usually before 18 months. But this dog was already a couple of years old.

There's lots of useful information on the subject on the internet, but a lot of well-intentioned misinformation too, so in any coprophagia case I think it's well worth a vet check to ensure there's nothing awry in his digestive system.

An altogether different possibility is that he'd discovered it gets him attention if he steals the full bags. It's become a game. From that, he's discovered a taste for it. Realistically, there's little you'll be able to do in the moment to tell him off in a meaningful way and simply ignoring the behaviour is nigh-on impossible in a case like this.

As I write, it's early days for us to be seeing an improvement – but with anything like this I'd expect to make a change over weeks rather than days. It's one of those cases where there's no quick answer. There are some things that I can fix in hours, but this isn't one of them.

If you think you have an attention-seeking problem like this, it's important to reduce as much as possible the opportunity to be naughty (in this case stealing poo bags), because the fact is that every time he pulls a fast one, we take a step backwards. I sometimes worry it may sound like a cop-out on my part, but at times focusing on prevention really is much better than cure. The old adages are usually right, eh?



Graeme Hall is recognised as one of Britain's top trainers. He's trained more than 4,000 dogs of all breeds, including some for the Hollywood film industry. For more information and free dog advice, check out: [Dogfather Training.co.uk](http://DogfatherTraining.co.uk)



A day in the life of a vet

E-cigarettes and your pet

Smoking e-cigarettes is seen to reduce the health risks associated with smoking compared to regular cigarettes. But the rise in their use has impacted on the number of dogs and cats being accidentally poisoned.

Pets are known to chew almost anything and e-cigarettes and their refill bottles are no different. The wide variety of flavours and aromas are particularly enticing and once the nicotine is ingested, it's quickly absorbed and signs of poisoning can be seen in as little as 15 minutes.

The initial signs include: excessive drooling, vomiting, diarrhoea, agitation and panting or an increased respiratory rate. Symptoms of severe intoxication include: disorientation, excitation, tremors, twitching, convulsions and ultimately coma – then death.

Cats have a double risk. The ingredient, propylene glycol, found in most e-cigarettes is poisonous to cats. Symptoms of the poisoning include: pale gums, fever,

loss of appetite, weakness and reddish brown urine.

If you suspect your cat or dog has ingested e-cigarette liquid, prompt and aggressive veterinary treatment is paramount. The liquid is so rapidly absorbed that standard decontamination, such as inducing vomiting, is unhelpful.

There is no specific antidote but treatment is aimed at managing any convulsions or fits, treating any heart or blood pressure abnormalities and placing the animal on a drip to increase the rate of nicotine elimination from the body.

The prognosis for patients exposed to large amounts of nicotine is grave but will depend on how quickly veterinary help is sought. Sadly, even with aggressive treatment some animals will not survive.



Rachel Caplan is a small animal vet based in Bedfordshire. Visit: bonessvets.co.uk



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Melissa Volpi is studying Equine Behaviour.

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Horse behaviour

Stereotypic behaviour

My horse Maia started to display stereotypic behaviour during an extended period of box rest. My then two-year-old went from living out 24/7 in an 11-acre paddock to being confined to a 12x12 stable for more than six months, after being involved in a freak accident.

It was a difficult adjustment for her to make and she showed this frustration by box walking – when a horse paces around its stable repeatedly. It made me sad to see Maia like this and all I wanted to do was solve the problem. But not everything can and should be fixed.

As distressing as it was for the livery yard residents and I to watch Maia display this behaviour, it would have been far more distressing for her if she were not allowed to express herself.

The most common misconception about stereotypies, as they're called, is that they are learned behaviours that must be stopped. If your horse crib bites, there are gels, pastes and sprays that you can buy to discourage your horse from grasping surfaces with his incisor teeth.

If your horse wind sucks, there are collars that you can buy to stop him from arching his neck and drawing gulps of air into his throat. And if your horse weaves, by moving his head and neck from side to side and shifting his weight from one foreleg to the other, then you can buy an anti-weaving grill for the stable door.

These products help us more than our horses though. If your horse is stressed because of something in his daily routine (something that you can't change immediately), then it's better to allow safe expression – as studies have shown that the repetitive action of stereotypic behaviours has a calming de-arousal effect on the animal.

Triggers and management

The important things to remember about stereotypic behaviour in horses are that they don't develop because of boredom and other horses don't copy them. Stereotypic behaviours are triggered

by arousal. A horse that's anticipating his morning feed could show his enthusiasm and excitement by weaving. A horse that gets left alone in the stable while his best friend goes out for a hack could show his anxiety by box walking. Horses are just like humans: they have different personalities, different pain thresholds and different ways of coping with stress.

Stereotypies are not stable vices – behaviours that you have to fear and keep under wraps. They are repetitive reactions that are caused by frustration, excitement, fear, conflicting signals and pain. It's our job as caring owners to find out what's causing our horses to react in this way.

The problem that I had with Maia was that I could not give her what she wanted, which was the freedom of living out full-time with her friends. I had to find creative ways of mimicking this freedom with a horse that had two legs covered in thick padding (one foreleg from elbow to pastern and one hind leg from hock to hoof) and could hardly walk.

The thing that really frustrated Maia the most was me constantly invading her space throughout the day. I went in four times a day to feed her, three times a day to muck out, once a day to change bandages, and numerous times more to try and make her feel good and give her a groom.

It got to the stage where Maia even resented me coming into her stable with feed. She wanted space and I couldn't give her that within the current routine.

So, I decided to move Maia into Zara's stable while I did the mucking out. Zara was on box rest too, to help keep her friend's spirits up. When I let her out to wander the stable courtyard every day, I would walk Maia the few metres into Zara's space and leave them to it while I did the daily chores.

This very simple change in Maia's routine made all the difference to her mind. Zara would wander over to her stable when Maia was in it and give her a mutual groom over the door and Maia not only had a different view (because of the layout of the stable yard), she also had the peace she craved. 🐾

LOOK A BIT DEEPER:

Addressing the situation that's causing your horse's stress, rather than treating the symptoms, can pay off in the long run





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Image: by courtesy of McDonalds: Lauren (right) completed a placement year at McDonalds



Battered and bruised...

Is working outdoors really good for your health? **Clare Hunt** isn't convinced...



Words by:
Clare Hunt

Clare is a writer and smallholder novice enjoying the good life in Devon

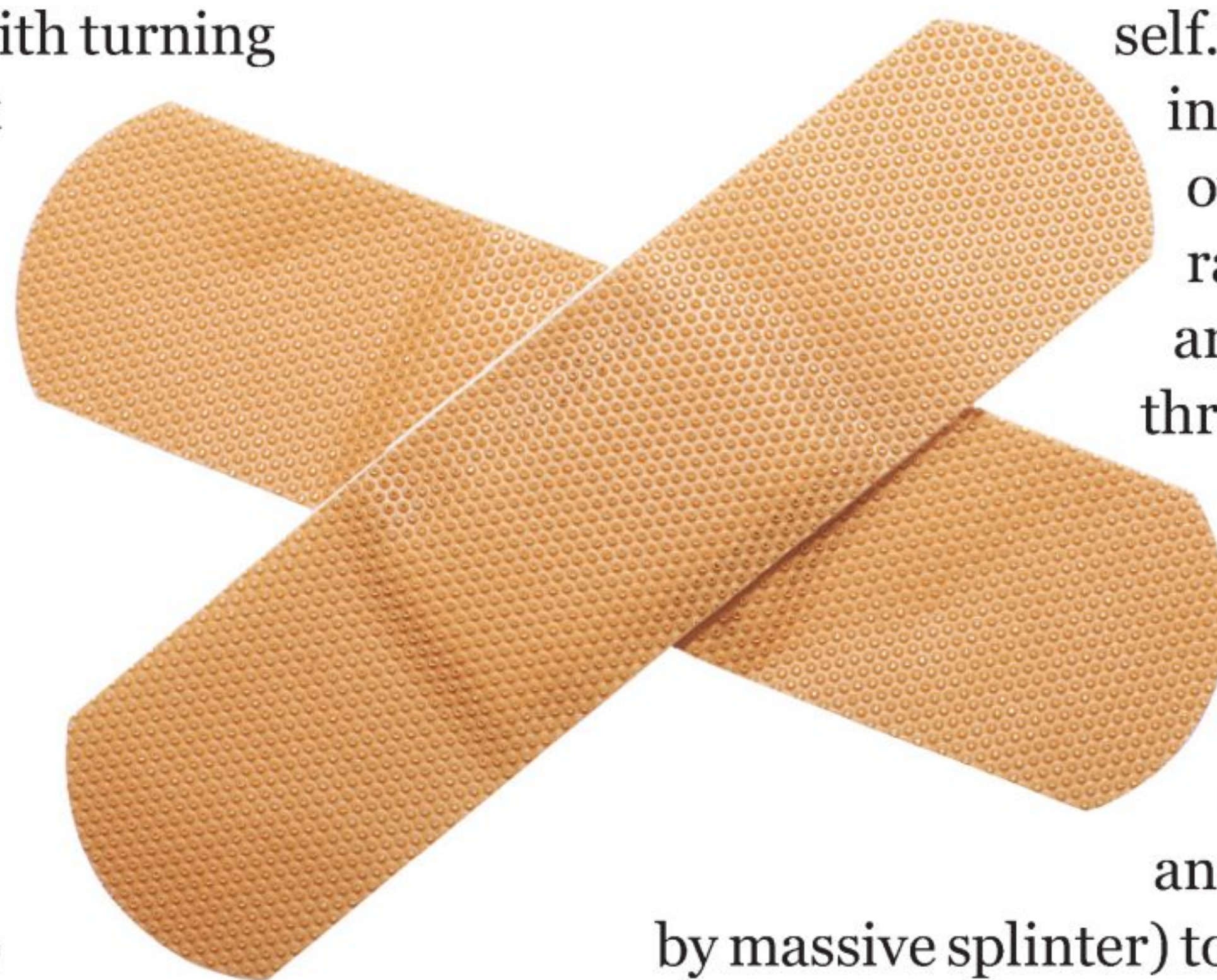
LAST MAY I PUT my back out when a flying lamb punched me in the face. At the time I was so consumed with indignation at having failed to acquire a black eye during the lamb punch that I failed to properly take heed of my back.

So I blithely ploughed on with turning lambs and checking their feet for a couple of hours. The next day, it was immediately apparent that something was amiss – when I couldn't get out of bed.

It wasn't just a bit of mild middle-aged creakage or a momentarily stiff joint, I was properly stuck, flat-out, with my brain giving instructions and my body not sure what to do with them.

Despite a fair bit of physiotherapy and some undignified exercises, my back has never been the same since. I have had to conclude (admittedly, rather late in the day) that animals and hard graft are bad for your health.

MEEK AND MILD: Even something as cute and innocent as a lamb can cause injury to the smallholder!



Ask anyone and they'd most likely associate an outdoorsy lifestyle with a glowing tan, rosy cheeks, strapping muscles and abundant energy. In complete opposition to that stereotype, I find myself an increasingly creaky shadow of my former self. These days, I have to plan in advance if I want to bend over, my nose is wind-chapped rather than sun-freckled and as for my hands, they go through the mill on a regular basis. I'm currently running a 3-in-10 ratio of black fingernails, with injuries ranging from the mundane (slammed in barn door) and the excruciating (impaled by massive splinter) to the mildly preposterous (crushed between turkey legs).

On any average day I have a range of unexplained bruises of the sort more usually seen on a corpse in 'Silent Witness' and whenever I dig the veg patch I invariably aggravate a muscle injury affectionately known in our house as 'Gardener's Bottom'.

It's possible that I could try being a bit less gung-ho with lifting, heaving, hammering, chopping and digging, but even seemingly benign, indoor activities are fraught with danger. I recently took up a circular knitting technique (often used for knitting socks) that requires four needles to be used at once. Trying to keep track of what's going on with four needles certainly gave me brain ache. What I didn't expect was the chronic tendonitis it brought on in my left hand.

Going to the pharmacy and asking for a compression bandage with which to treat my knitting injury was greeted with some surprise. Or at least that's how I chose to interpret the assistant's expression. And that's not my only wool-related trauma: as a way of making fruitful use of raw wool I card it by hand and use it for needle felting. Which sounds like the sort of genteel activity a lady of the Regency period may appropriately engage in. Until, that is, you see the sharp-pinned hand-carders (effective at combing fingers as well as wool) and the lethal barbed needles that are determined to inflict a through-and-through injury on any thumb left unthimble.

I'm not sure I've ever really held with the philosophy that 'what doesn't kill you makes you stronger'. Maybe it does spiritually, but on a physical level what doesn't kill you just makes you stiffer. Hard work might gladden the soul, but it really isn't good for the musculoskeletal system. So the next time I'm in the vicinity of a flying lamb, I'll make sure I've done a few stretches first. 🐑



Nature Magpie with Dan Allen

Dr Daniel Allen is a unique commentator of nature-society interactions. He is also the author of 'The Nature Magpie' out now in paperback (Icon, £8.99/£7.99 eBook).



Making molehills

Everyone is familiar with molehills – the freshly excavated mud mounds that break through carefully manicured lawns and greens during the night. Yet remarkably, despite there being an estimated 31 million moles (*Talpa europaea*) in the UK, few people have observed the subterranean mammal in the wild.

Solitary, reclusive, and light-sensitive, the mole is the only British mammal that lives permanently underground. Feeding mainly on earthworms, their spade-like front paws and powerful digging can move 540 times their own body weight of soil in a single day. This equates to about 20 metres of tunnel; all of which must be excavated to the surface.

Moles construct a complicated burrow system and during the breeding season (February to June) they make long surface tunnels to help search for a potential mate and prey. These romantic reconnaissance missions lead to an increase in emerging molehills. Moles generally mate in March, the sow gives birth to three to five offspring in April, the young are suckled for a month, then driven out of their maternal territory at 35 days old.

William III of England, also known as William of Orange, died on 8 March 1702. Despite wars with France, King Louis XIV did not have a role in his death. The Catholic Jacobites who opposed the Protestant King were also not responsible. The perpetrator was far more unlikely.

While hunting in Richmond Park, the king's horse, Sorrell, had stumbled throwing the royal rider and cracking his collar-bone. This injury soon became infected, his health deteriorated, leading to his untimely death. What had Sorrell the horse stumbled upon? A rather humble molehill. For years later, Jacobites would secretly raise their glasses to "the little gentleman in the black velvet waistcoat".

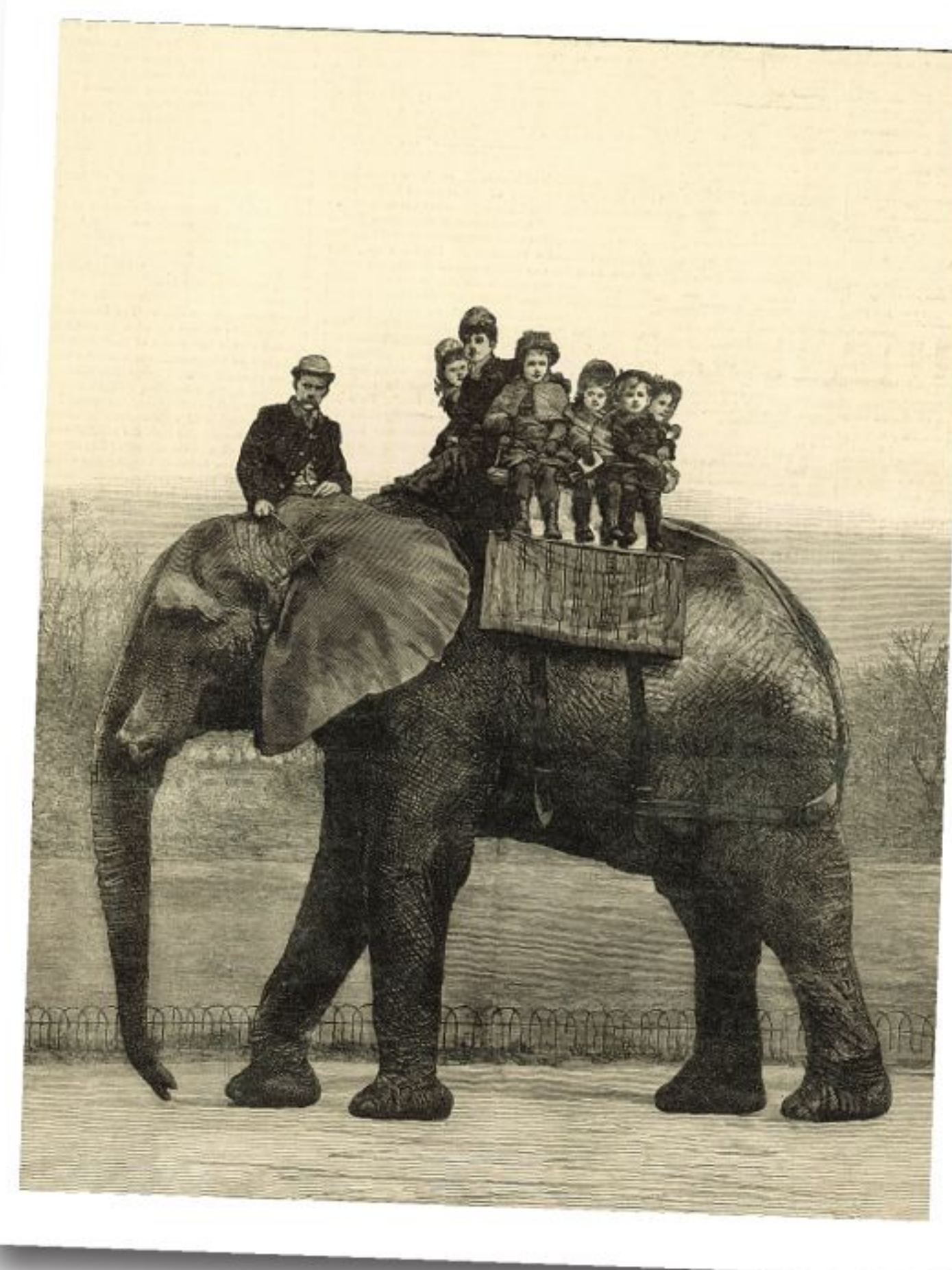


Jumbo mania

A hundred thousand children wrote heartfelt letters to Queen Victoria pleading her to intervene in the sale of Jumbo (1861-1885). But it made little difference. PT Barnum had already paid London Zoo \$10,000 for the world's largest elephant and was making arrangements to ship him to New York. After 17 years of being the much-loved 'pet of the zoo', 1881 was the year Jumbo-mania headed to the States.

Across the Atlantic, Jumbo became the star attraction in 'The Greatest Show on Earth', and the most famous elephant in the world. During his four years in the circus, 16 million adults and 4 million children paid to see him.

On 15 September 1885 Jumbo was tragically killed by an unscheduled freight train but even this untimely death did not diminish his fame. Barnum arranged for the hide to be stuffed and the skeleton to be displayed and these remains toured with the circus from 1886.



'Raven-mad'

Charles Dickens was said to be 'raven-mad'. In fact, he famously kept at least four pet ravens, two called Grip, during his career. Their ability to mimic human speech, intelligence and playful nipping at his children's ankles made them an entertaining addition to the family home.

They also proved to be inspirational. Grip inspired the same-named pet raven in his historical novel 'Barnaby Rudge' (1841). When American literary critic Edgar Allan Poe reviewed the book, Grip the Raven was a focus of his criticism: 'The raven, too, intensely amusing as it is, might have been made, more than we now see it, a portion of the conception of the fantastic Barnaby.'

In 1845, just four years later, Poe published his career-defining, chilling poem, 'The Raven'. When Grip died in 1841, Charles Dickens sent his pet to the taxidermist and had him mounted. A later auction and donation saw Grip finding a new home at the Free Library of Philadelphia Rare Book Department, where he remains today.



Gardening with Pippa Greenwood

Pippa Greenwood is a trained botanist and a regular presenter on Radio 4's Gardeners' Question Time. Visit: pippagreenwood.com



Without a doubt, this is one of the busiest months in the gardening year. March is the month when I try to get ahead with some gardening jobs while also catching up on those I should have done before. But as the days get visibly longer and warmer, it's just pure pleasure!



Edibles

- There's still time to 'chit' some seed potatoes ready for planting later this month or in April. Pop the tubers into empty seed trays or old egg cartons, plumpest end uppermost, and in a cool but frost-free spot with plenty of natural light. This 'chitting' process allows them to form short, sturdy sprouts which should mean a slightly earlier and heavier crop.
- Any tree, bush or cane fruits will really benefit from a dressing of sulphate of potash to the soil around the root area. The potassium in this will help to ensure a heavier crop of fruit, be it on your raspberries, currants, gooseberries, strawberries, apples, apricots or pears (to mention but a few!). To be of use it needs to be in solution, not as a powder, so make sure you water it in well.
- Prick-out and pot-on seedlings of vegetables sown earlier in the year. Preparing new pots before the move helps to reduce stress to the seedlings and young plants. Treat seedlings with great care and handle only by their chunkier 'seed leaves' then water them in well once in their new pots.



Flowers

- Get supports such as plant rings and twiggly sticks in place around herbaceous perennials.
- Prepare a patch of soil by clearing weeds and debris, fork it over well and add some fertiliser, then sow some hardy annual flower seeds. Why not try some of my favourites such as love-in-a-mist, cornflowers, candy tuft, annual poppies and sweet sultan.
- Take cuttings from favourite pelargoniums and fuchsias which you've been overwintering. Taken now you can still produce good flowering-sized plants for use in containers or beds this year.
- Grab a bucket and a trowel and go on a slug and snail hunt. The more you can collect now, the better the situation will be when there is tastier, tender foliage about!



All over the garden

- Weeds start to grow faster than your cosseted garden plants and, at this time of the year, they can cause some serious competition to the more mild-mannered flowers. Hoe between emerging herbaceous perennials, germinating annuals, bulbs, young vegetables and beneath shrubs and climbers. The soft new weed growth will make a great addition to the compost heap as long as it isn't already bearing seed heads. More pernicious weeds with fleshy roots such as docks and dandelions need a bit more effort, as it's essential that you remove every last bit of their roots if you're to get control, but this, too, is easier now while the soil is still quite moist.
- Mild spells in March often bring out a flush of pest outbreaks, pests which you may well not expect to see until later in the year! Check young growth on trees and shrubs for aphids (greenfly and blackfly) and squash these pests before they cause any damage.
- With winter on its way out, it's worth doing a final clear-up of all those leaves which have been repeatedly re-distributed around the garden. They may well be fine when left on the soil beneath shrubs or trees or even in flower beds, but brush them off the crowns of herbaceous perennials, vegetables and emerging bulbs.



Go for glorious gold!

There's nothing quite like the sight of some warming golden flowers to brighten your summer and lift your mood. Sow seeds now and you can bring splashes of richest gold to pots, planters, beds and borders. Try these:



- Gazania 'TigerStripesMixed'
- Cosmos 'Polidor'
- Calendula 'Neon'
- Nasturtium 'Spotty Dotty'
- Nasturtium 'St Clements'
- Chrysanthemum 'Sunset'
- Rudbeckia 'Prairie Sun'
- Californian poppy 'Copper Swirl'
- Californian poppy 'Sun Shades'
- Rudbeckia 'RusticDwarfs Mixed'

Back British Farming

At Countryside we're proud to support our hard-working farmers. Why? Well, they produce our food, underpin our

rural economies, and create and maintain our most cherished rural landscapes. If you feel as we do, then these two pages should give you some great ideas about how you too can back Britain's farmers.



Thatched roofing

Thatched cottages and farm buildings were the norm in rural Britain for millennia and, whilst less common today, they retain a certain prestige and cherished place in the landscape. Thatch is a natural product of reed and straw, and, when properly cut, dried, and thatched, forms a surprisingly weatherproof roof. Most common is wheat straw in the south of England, with reeds used in East Anglia reflecting the available material. Thatch is also a natural insulator, and the air pockets within a straw thatch roof insulate a building in both warm and cold weather. A thatched roof will ensure that a building will be cool in summer and warm in winter.

● You can find your local thatcher on the National Society of Master Thatchers website at: www.nsmthd.co.uk/find-a-thatcher/

Straw insulation

The likes of wheat and barley could be regarded as a wonder plant - they produce our bread, biscuits and beer - and, of course, straw. In some respects a by-product, straw is used for everything from animal bedding to home insulation. Straw bale insulated homes can last over 100 years if properly maintained, and are also 100 per cent biodegradable. They have also been proven to be more flame retardant than conventional wood-frame construction, mainly because the bales are so dense and tend to just smoulder.

Leather upholstery

Leather is a valuable by-product of the meat industry and, for hundreds of years, has been used for clothing, in the equine industry, but also, increasingly, in our homes too.

From leather sofas to leather floors, this stylish material can transform a room - and mature in a way that synthetic materials simply can't match. Different parts of the hide will have different uses. From one hide, you can get one shoulder piece, two belly pieces and two "butts" (the back pieces).

Devon's J & FJ Baker and Co is the only traditional oak bark tannery in Britain making the highest quality, most durable leather for a wide range of leather goods including shoes, equestrian equipment and interiors, with all their hides sourced from local farmers.



From thatch roofs to wool carpets, straw insulation to renewable energy for keeping the lights on, food is probably just the beginning when it comes to farming's contribution to your home...

The house that farming built

Wooden beams, floors and furnishings

Timber frames are the most common form of house construction on the planet. Whilst our skyscrapers and factory warehouses tend to be palaces of glass and steel, many smaller scale homes rely on the biggest plant of all: timber from our woods and forests. While hardwoods are ideal for high-quality joinery, furniture and flooring, softwoods are most likely used in general construction. Whether it's wooden floors, walls or furniture, wood gives a house both character and strength.

Wool carpets/blankets

Wool may be one of our oldest materials but it's still among the safest and most intelligent fibres around.

Dr Mike Madden of Enco Global Testing Services says: "Wool is a sustainable fibre that's grown to protect sheep from the weather and to keep it healthy.

"There is a natural cycle of lambing, shearing, eating grass, keeping the countryside fertilised and habitable and then growing a new fleece.

"I coined the phrase that the sheep is the original free range animal, which is exactly what it is. Wool is the by-product of the sheep industry in Britain and makes the fibre environmentally friendly with an impressively low carbon footprint."

Many of our farmed sheep breeds produce some of the best wool in the world for making carpets and rugs, blankets and beds and other interior textiles. This is because the breed of sheep and the climatic conditions in which they live produces a fleece that has natural resilience and springiness, meaning carpets look better for longer as they resist flattening.

Wool also makes for great insulation as it absorbs toxins emitted from building materials such as formaldehyde and the fibres not only trap escaping heat they also radiate heat when they absorb airborne moisture. Consequently, many houses now have wool insulation rolls in their roof space. Wool insulation can also reduce carbon dioxide emissions in a typical house by one tonne per year and is far more effective at absorbing noise than synthetic counterparts. It's also easy and safe to install, the wool fibre will never irritate and it's 100 per cent biodegradable.

● **DID YOU KNOW?:** 70% of Britain's sheep wool goes into carpet production, providing thousands of manufacturing jobs.



Renewable energy

Farmland has been used for both food and energy production for hundreds of years, providing fuel for heating, cooking and traction power, as well as crops and pasture for livestock.

Today, more than a third of Britain's farmers and growers are using wind, sun, farm by-products and energy crops to produce clean low-carbon energy. A variety of farm-based renewables already provide electricity and heat for on-farm use, sometimes also supplying local businesses and homes in rural communities.

Biogas digesters, wind turbines large and small, solar roofs, solar fields and biomass boilers are all becoming more commonplace in the countryside - and they are very much part of the future of the agricultural economy.



View from the farm: March

Trevor Foss reminisces about his holiday while he prepares for spring farm work

IT FEELS A BIT like I'm coming out of hibernation as we approach March and the farm starts to wake up. Newborn lambs, nesting birds and hopefully the first green shoots appear in the countryside – March really signals the beginning of another busy year.

Our beef cattle will have to stay housed for a while longer, but we should have nearly finished selling the fattening ones this month. It would be nice to be able to turn out the rest to grass in early April but that will depend a lot on how well it grows. Thankfully, we do have a good supply of silage at present, but a late spring could result in the cattle needing a few extra weeks inside.

This is the first chance I've had to write in detail about our holiday last December. For some time, we have wanted to visit India and combine a sightseeing holiday with visiting the school that my wife's mother attended as a child.

As we landed in Delhi all I could see was a patchwork of colours; it was just like looking down onto a huge area of trial plots. What I hadn't realised was the land around Delhi Agra and Jaipur would be so flat and fertile. We drove through the countryside and discovered the land was well farmed, growing two crops a year – mostly of wheat, potatoes or rice.

There were lots of small tractors, many of which were decorated and some even played loud music as they went along the roads. In the fields we could see a lot of the work being done by hand and it appeared very labour-intensive – the majority of workers appeared to be women.

A huge pipeline big enough to drive a car inside was being laid next to the road. This will carry water as the demand has meant wells have had to go down double the depth in the past 10 years. With a country population of 1.25 billion people, food production is vital – but will there be enough water to drink and irrigate? This is surely a question not only for India but also many other countries.

Back home in colder climes, the winter-sown oilseed rape has come through the winter well and, at present, we have managed to keep the wood pigeons from eating too much.

Because the plant grows so quickly if we get warm days, it may get two applications of nitrogen. Certainly by early April it should be racing away; it appears you can almost see it growing sometimes if conditions are right.

Winter wheat will also get a nitrogen application. Rates will vary slightly depending on growth, with less needed in fields that have received farmyard manure last autumn. We have to buy nitrogen with added sulphur, which was not the case just a few



TOP DRESS: Giving our winter wheat more nitrogen to spur growth

years ago. The reduction of coal burning power stations means far less sulphur in the atmosphere. This has led to a deficiency in sulphur for the growing crop, which we now have to replace.

We don't have any spring-sown crops ourselves to plant this year. Rotations are changing on many farms and, with improved spring varieties of wheat, and particularly barley, many farms will be busy planting those when the ground is dry enough. Spring beans are another popular choice, but spring rape has lost a little of its gloss due to pest damage and lower yield.

In March, farm wildlife will have a spring in its step. When out walking, find a quiet spot and stand still for a while. You may well see cock pheasants as they strut their stuff trying to impress the ladies. If you're very

lucky you may glimpse a couple of mad March hares boxing away. They're often so preoccupied they pass very close by. Standing up on their hind legs they really do smack at each other with front legs jabbing away like pistons.

Please remember to keep dogs close by. Many ground-nesting birds will be sitting and a loose dog will work a hedge and may even catch a bird as it sits tightly on its nest. 🐾



Tip of the month

Cover your vegetable patch with plastic, as this warms up the ground before planting



Trevor Foss runs a mixed farm in Northamptonshire and has been involved with the NFU for many years

PROTECT & CONSERVE

www.foxlights.com



A

s a breeder of rare breeds what would you consider as one of the biggest issues? Am I right in thinking it would be the protection of your livestock?

What are you doing at the moment to protect your livestock - shooting the predator, poisoning the predator or staying awake keeping watch? THIS could be your answer - FOXLIGHTS - an invention of an Australian farmer to keep foxes from taking his lambs.

The idea behind FOXLIGHTS is to create the impression of someone walking around the area with a flash light. The key to creating this impression is the computerised board that produces a random pattern of flashes and rotations of the 9 LED bulbs to generate a 360 degree random light show.

After years of testing and then years in production the lights have proved their effectiveness.

The lights are fitted with a sensor enabling self operation between dusk and dawn. There is a battery operated version and a solar powered version of the light.

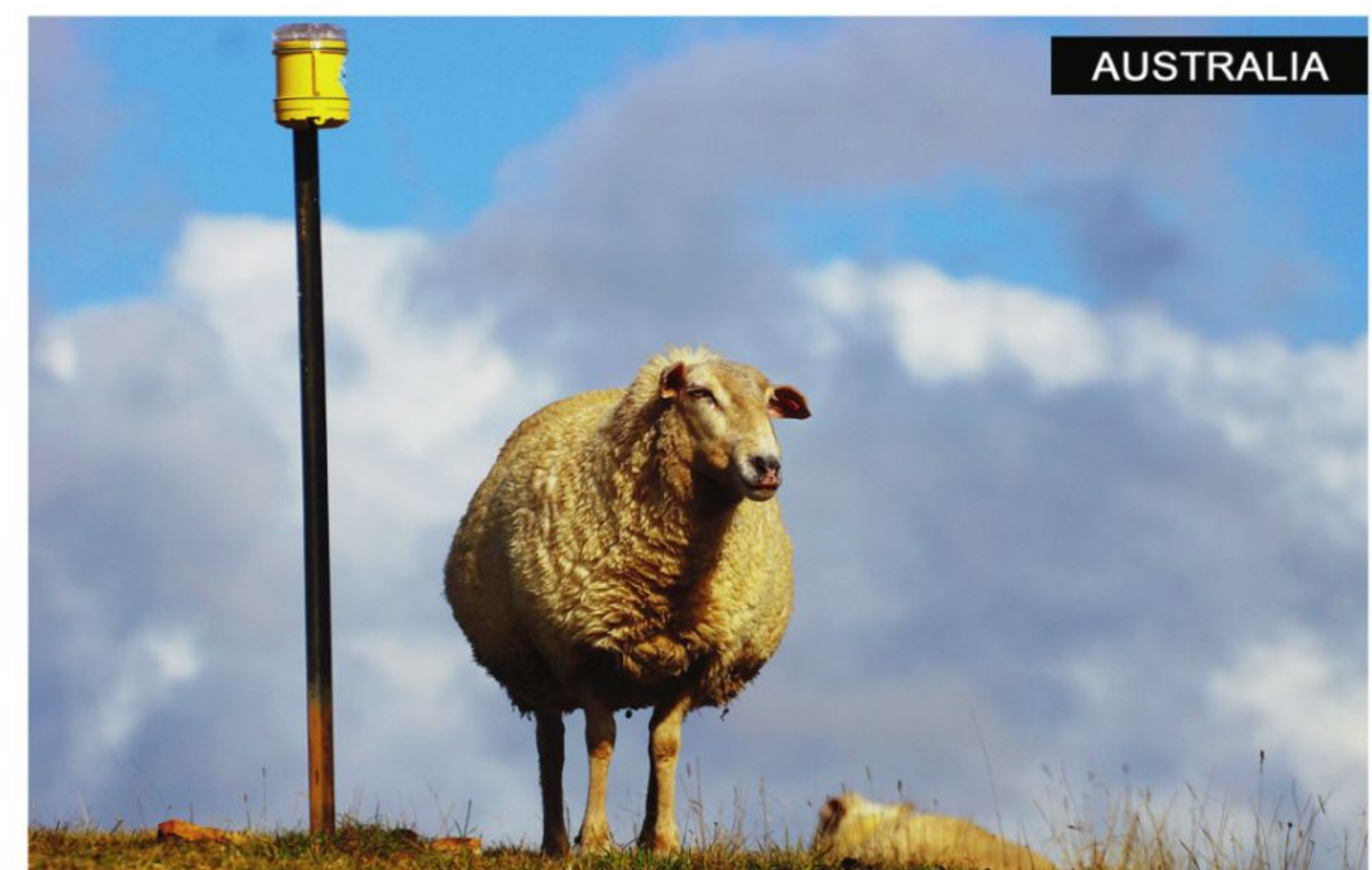
The reason I'm writing this is to also reach people with an empathy with conservation. Conservation of rare breeds and conservation of all endangered species. Protection of one's livelihood has, for so long, been solved by destroying the predator but the predator is also a gift of creation playing its part in the balancing of nature.

Ian is thrilled that his lights now protect wolves being re-introduced into parts of the USA. In Indonesia they help farmers protect their crops while also protecting the endangered predator - the magnificent elephant.

In Nepal these lights are protecting both the farmers' livestock and their precious, endangered predator the Snow Leopard. Here in the UK the lights are being used to protect lambs, poultry and game birds. I have sold hundreds and as a testimony to their effectiveness many customers have made second and third purchases.



LIVESTOCK MORTALITY DATA IS BEING COLLECTED.
NEWLY INSTALLED FOXLIGHT IN BACKGROUND. (SLC/NTNC)



FOXLIGHT IN AUSTRALIA PHOTO BY KUNTA HSIEH

Please visit our web site, www.foxlights.com, for more information along with testimonials from farmers who have had success with the lights and exciting video footage of conservation in the USA, Nepal, Kenya and Indonesia.

You can also contact me, Derek Lewis, to purchase on 0121 552 8097 or 07403204994 or email at dkl11@hotmail.com



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Mr Heron, Kent.

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Mr and Mrs Boulton, Staffordshire.

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Farmer Tim

FARMER TIM loves this time of the year. It's lambing time and he gets to help his dad look after some of the lambs who need a bit of extra care and attention.

Sometimes a lamb is unable to get food from its mother, so it will need to be bottle-fed to make sure it's getting enough to eat, so Tim will volunteer to feed the lambs. But you can't just feed a lamb once and then leave it for the rest of the time – small lambs will need feeding regularly throughout the day and night for a while until they grow big enough and strong enough to look after themselves.

This means that Tim's dad has to get up in the night to make sure they are bottle-fed. Tim has to go to school so needs his sleep, but he does his feeding time after school and at weekends when his dad is very grateful for Farmer Tim's help.

● For more Farmer Tim fun, visit: farmertim.com or the Welly Club at countrysideonline.co.uk

Feed the lambs!

There are lots of farms parks around the country where you can have a go at feeding lambs. Here's a few to try:

Willows Activity Farm

Coursers Road, London Colney, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL4 0PF

Live lambing, newborn lamb bottle feeding demonstrations and a full day's programme of fleecy fun. Hundreds of twin lambs are due to be born during the February Frolics event between 11 and 19 February.

willowsactivityfarm.com

Hall Hill Farm

Lanchester, Durham DH7 0TA

Come and see the newborn lambs from 18 March to 2 May. There are several different breeds of sheep which will lamb over the eight-week period.

hillfarm.co.uk

Snettisham Park

Bircham Road, Snettisham, King's Lynn, Norfolk PE31 7NG

With more than 400 ewes to lamb, there's plenty of opportunities to meet lambs and get to bottle feed them.

Snettishampark.co.uk

Cotswold Farm Park

Bemborough Farm, Kington, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL54 5UG

Lambing takes place between 11 February and 23 April, with special weekends to celebrate the farm's rare breed sheep.

cotswoldfarmpark.co.uk



The Big Sheep

Bideford, Devon EX39 5AP

Lambing Live takes place at the park from 11 to 19 February when you can feed the lambs and take part in the Sheep Show.

bigsheep.co.uk

Cantref Adventure Farm

Upper Cantref Farm, Cantref, Brecon LD3 8LR

February half-term sees the Lambing Festival, from 18-26 February. Join Farmer Ken in the Lambing Barn and you may be lucky enough to see lambs being born.

cantref.com

Gaston Farm

School Hill, Slindon, Arundel, West Sussex BN18 0RS

The farm opens for lambing days between 19 March and 17 April and you can see lambs being born and get the chance to cuddle orphan lambs.

Gastonfarm.com

All about sheep!

- Sheep are herbivores that eat vegetation such as grass.
- The fleece of sheep have been used to make human clothing since the Stone Age.
- Sheep's wool has incredible UV protection built in which stops sheep and lambs from getting sunburnt.
- Sheep have excellent all-round vision of around 270 degrees, which means they can see behind themselves without turning their heads!
- A University of Cambridge professor tested the intelligence of sheep by using yellow and blue buckets to see how long it would take them to learn they could find food in the same coloured bucket each time. Surprisingly, the sheep learned this in about the same time as it would take monkeys in similar tests.



The inside job

NAME: Ross Garner

LIVES: Buckinghamshire

JOB: Home Insurance Specialist at NFU Mutual



Ross Garner
Ross is a home insurance specialist at NFU Mutual

Ross Garner is a home insurance specialist at NFU Mutual, which was founded by seven farmers in 1910. Ross loves the variety in his role and working with industry specialists and a wide range of properties.

Q How did you become a home insurance specialist?

A I have had a lifetime career in insurance, starting aged 17 in home and motor insurance. My roles have included underwriting and dealing with customers directly as a broker. In recent years, I've been working for NFU Mutual, developing new insurance products and services for customers.

Q What skills do you need for the job?

A The best skill that you can have is to put yourself in your customers' shoes, to understand their insurance needs and requirements to protect their property. It's important to have knowledge of the properties you're insuring; understanding the heritage of buildings and the specialist building techniques that would be involved should the building suffer any damage.

Q What are the essentials to remember when buying home insurance?

A The main point is to make sure you're properly protected and to seek advice. Whether it's valuing your home or the precious contents that you own, go to the experts.

Q Are there any common pitfalls to look out for?

A If you live in a listed property, check that you're adequately insured against the cost of rebuilding your home if any major accidents or damage occur. Make sure it covers the real cost of restoring your home, which could involve listed consent, specialist materials and construction processes. Your house and its contents will also change over the years, so regularly review your insurance. Antiques, fine art and collections can go up and down in value, so keep up-to-date with what your contents are worth.

Q What can people do themselves to safeguard their homes or possessions?

A Think about security around entry and exit to your property. As well as considering alarm systems, work with your local Neighbourhood Watch and if you have a good relationship with your neighbours, give them a point of contact if they see anything suspicious. You may want to consider using home-sitters arrangements or inviting friends or relatives to stay while you're away.



Q What are the risks at this particular time of year?

A Even in March, it's important to check your chimney. Our claims over the past three years have shown there were more chimney fires from January to March than there were from October to December. If you have an open fire, multi-fuel or wood-burning stove, make sure you have your chimney swept before the first fire of the season and again in the spring, during the time for nesting birds, if you're using it more frequently.

Use recommended hard woods that have been seasoned for two years and ensure the chimney is inspected regularly. Bird guards can also deter birds from building nests in your chimney.

Q What's the best piece of advice you've ever received?

A Price is what you pay, value is what you get. Making sure you have adequate cover will not only give you peace of mind, but could also save you money in the long term.

Q What are the most unusual claims you've dealt with?

A A pan fire caused a great deal of damage to the contents and décor of a policyholder's home. One damaged item was a life-sized, stuffed polar bear.

In another claim, a Jack Russell terrier found himself locked in a Land Rover, and caused a large amount of damage. Whilst in the car he managed to shred the seat bases and rip the covering off the steering wheel, leaving the metal frame exposed.

The dog was fortunately in fine fettle when released a few hours later, which is more than can be said for the interior of the car.

And finally, at a children's party a chocolate fountain was greeted with great enthusiasm until it exploded, covering both children and the carpet in warm molten chocolate.

Q What's been your best day at work so far?

A In insurance, you are there for some of the most challenging times in people's lives and it's really rewarding when you can help. Family homes are full of personal memories, and on one occasion, a customer had his home ransacked and vandalised. He and his wife were incredibly distressed by what had happened to them, but the way I dealt with the claim gave them peace of mind and they came back to thank me for everything I had done.

Q What would you say NFU Mutual is best known for?

A Having served the farming community for more than 100 years, we're a well-known rural insurer.

● Find out more at: nfumutual.co.uk



PICTURE: GETTY

Ask the rural entrepreneur

Alex Lacey talks to **Sophie Allport** about her unique designs, her relationship with the countryside, and her love of Marmite...



Q So Sophie, first off, how did you start your business?

A I've always loved to draw and paint, and my parents encouraged that. I graduated from Leeds with a degree in graphic art and design, specialising in illustration, and worked as a freelance illustrator for many years.

My brother Jem had always wanted to run his own business, so in 2007 we joined forces and Sophie Allport Limited was born. As a qualified chartered accountant, Jem has supplied the business acumen and drive, leaving me free to focus on design and product development.

Q And how has it grown since then?

A Back in 2007, we worked out of Jem's spare bedroom and produced cards, mugs and a few fabric items. Our next 'office' move was to Jem's garage, where there were four of us working part-time. This is where we began to expand the ranges. In 2011 we moved to a proper office and warehouse space a few miles from Stamford, Lincolnshire - where we still are today.



DESIGN GURU: Sophie's pets are an inspiration for many of her products

Q As a business, what do you feel is your key point of difference?

A I like to think my designs are unique and make people smile. They have a simplicity that allows everyone to be able to relate to them. My artwork is light-hearted

and tells the story of my influences. We work hard to design collections that are unique and deliver great customer service. We ensure our products are good quality with achievable prices and we help to make our customers' houses a home. A home is filled with things that you love and I want us to help people achieve that.

Q What's next for you? What do you see as the future for your business?

A We have just launched four new collections for spring/summer 2017 - Hearts, Runner Duck, 'Lay a little egg' and Bees. We've just finished our new autumn and Christmas designs, and are currently working on the spring 2018 collections. We're also expanding our range of products, so watch out for news of exciting new homewares in some of our key designs soon.

Q What advice would you offer to someone just starting out?

A The only advice I can offer is that I feel life is too short and we should all try to follow our dreams. Running your own business is seriously hard work though, so prepare yourself!

Q What's the best part of your job?

A I just love drawing and painting. I feel very lucky that I have been able to make a career out of my favourite pastime. Without my brother Jem, I'm not sure that would have been possible. We're a great team!

Q What have you seen change in your years in business?

A I think there are a lot more rural, entrepreneurial, small businesses now. It's easier for people to set up a business and to work from home. The internet has massively changed the way we work and shop in the past 10 years.



Mind your own business



Jerry Marshall is CEO of the Arthur Rank centre, which supports rural communities. He is a successful entrepreneur and an FCN trustee. Visit: germinate.net

FOLLOWERS OF THIS COLUMN now have a fabulously successful rural business or farm diversification project (if not, check out the workbook at germinate.net/enterprise). But what next? How can we create *even* more successful businesses?

Silver bullet

For once, there is a silver bullet for business success. Sure, there are many important things: if you don't keep an eye on costs and cashflow there might soon be no business left to develop. But when I look back on my earlier career as a marketing consultant, developing growth plans for small businesses, there was one thing that contributed more than all the other research put together (cue drum roll).

It's very simple, but surprisingly few businesses do it. Simply call some of your recent clients, say you are trying improve what you offer, and ask what they like about your product or service, and what they don't like. Take notes as they talk. Try to write down word for word their praise (use them as client testimonials in your brochure or website) and encourage them to be specific about what they don't like.

Ask questions to get details and clarification, and don't stop to justify or explain any problems – perception is reality. If there's a significant problem, deal with this at the end of the call by apologising (if appropriate) and explaining the action you will take.

You'll probably be surprised at both the positive comments and their willingness to contribute. Most people don't like questionnaires, but two open questions and an attentive listener will enhance their perception of you as a supplier.

It's also worth talking to your lost customers and lost prospects (enquiries that came to nothing). Tell them you realise there are many possible reasons for not going ahead with a purchase but that it would be really helpful to understand why it went no further.

For some, especially those selling through intermediaries, it may be more difficult to talk to end customers. But perhaps you can organise a product tasting in a retailer or attend a show.

At the Oxford Farming Conference back in January, Ali Capper (pictured) told a story of transforming the hop market by collaborating with others, visiting trade shows, understanding the profile and interests of craft beer drinkers, and listening to and educating the key hop trading companies.

She also spent time researching the 'Unique Selling Proposition' of British hops, developing a brand ('Brewed with British Hops'), selling the landscape and story as well as the product, growing exports, developing niche markets and constantly trialling new varieties and understanding market trends.

As a result, they have moved from being a commodity provider to selling a premium product with a four-fold increase in margins. It was an inspiring account of the importance of listening to customers.

● **Try it, and tell me how you got on:** drop me a line at: jerrym@germinate.net. And tell me how your business is going and/or what questions you have.



PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK

Q What do you love about living and working in the countryside?

A I love the countryside, nature and the changing of the seasons. All of my collections are inspired by the outdoors. With three boys, it's great to live in the countryside and have space and fresh air for them to run around and make as much noise as they want. I like the peace and quiet and the big skies of Lincolnshire. I paint in my studio at home and am continually inspired by the quirky pheasants in the garden, the bees buzzing around while I garden and the stags I see in the fields on the school run.

● **Find out more at:** sophieallport.com.

All about Sophie

- "My brother and I are rather competitive with sports; the last table tennis game we had, I beat him!"
- "I love Marmite so much I named my cat after my favourite spread (Marmite was the inspiration behind the Black Cat collection!)"
- "If you can smell burning, it's usually because I've left something in the Aga!"



Hidden value in old barns

Is this the time to convert your old barn into a home?

NFU Mutual's **David Brennan** finds out more



DEVELOPMENT RULES are now much more straightforward, but would utilising them be right for you?

In a decade of fast-changing planning rules, many farmers and landowners are reviewing the potential to convert a barn into residential use under permitted development rights (PDR) introduced in England in March 2014. The local planning authority (LPA) has to agree first to the change of use, and secondly to works being undertaken.

Take the right approach

On the Kent/Sussex border, Leo Hickish at surveyors Batcheller Monkhouse says some LPAs have adopted 'a very positive and flexible approach' providing the application ticks the right boxes: the barn must have been in agricultural use and it must be 'convertible'.

"This is a unique opportunity for unencumbered residential development that won't last forever," Leo says.

The maximum that may be converted is 450m² of floor space within a single established agricultural unit. Any garden or outside amenity area should technically be included in the curtilage.

"This offers an excellent opportunity where planning permission would not normally be granted for residential development, including to get a home for wider family members or for sale as there will be no agricultural tie on the building, but it can be complex and it's fraught with pitfalls, so I would always seek professional advice," says Suzanne Clear, NFU senior adviser.

Be compliant

PDR can be limiting; you can't extend the building or erect an agricultural building on the same unit under permitted development rights for 10 years.

So in some cases, a full planning application might be a more flexible option. The building has to be structurally strong enough in itself to convert.

Doors, windows, roofs, exterior walls, water, drainage, electricity, gas or other services can all be introduced, but only 'to the extent reasonably necessary for the building to function as a dwelling'.

The LPA must be given the chance to comment on matters such as access, services, noise, flooding and sustainability.

"For those who comply, it's a huge opportunity for the rural sector," says Hugh Townsend, of Townsend Chartered Surveyors.

Think about tax

Applicants are also strongly advised to look at the tax implications before undertaking any developments, says Richard Foreman, chartered financial planner at NFU Mutual.

"A building currently used for agricultural purposes may be eligible for Agricultural Property Relief (APR)," he says. "This means that some or all of the value may be free from inheritance tax. A building converted to residential use and let out will lose APR and the full value of the property may be subject to inheritance tax. Capital gains tax also needs to be considered. Finally, there's income tax. Any income generated by letting out a residential property will form part of your taxable income."

● *Tax can be complex and depends on your circumstances. Tax rules may change in the future.*

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MAKING HISTORY

Buy a house in the country

The future is looking bright for the rural housing market, says **Rupert Sweeting**, from Knight Frank



Words by:
Rupert Sweeting
Rupert is head of the country house department at estate agents Knight Frank

IN THE PRIME country house market, caution was replaced with optimism in the past few months of 2016, and momentum is building for a strong 2017. After the uncertainty surrounding the EU Referendum and the surprise vote to leave, it seems that sellers and buyers have had enough of the 'wait and see' attitude and now want to get on with their property lives.

This is underlined by the findings in our most recent Prime Country House Index, which showed that the sub-£1m country property market continues to attract the lion's share of demand, accounting for more than 50% of transactions in 2016.

Properties in this price bracket have been less affected by recent tax changes and, accordingly, have seen price growth of 3.5% on average over the past 12 months.

Also, the number of £2m-plus sales completed by Knight Frank in 2016 was 9% higher compared with 2015, with nearly 60% of such deals taking place in the second half of the year. Data collected by Knight Frank reveals November was the busiest month for £2m-plus transactions since December 2014.

Another factor that has, in recent times put the brakes on activity above the £2m level in the country is the rise in stamp duty across the board and the extra 3% payable on second homes or investment properties. Yet we are now seeing the impact of this receding, as agents factor it into valuations and buyers come to terms with a higher tax that's now part of the cost of doing business.

Country homes in demand

Generally, demand for country homes remains robust across all levels, with a 9.6% year-on-year increase in the number of new prospective buyer registrations in the three months to the end of December, and a 4% increase over 2016 as a whole.

The number of viewings also rose by 14% year-on-year in the three months to the end of December. Good prime housing



stock continues to attract strong buyer interest, particularly that which is best in class, and appropriately priced, but supply remains tight across the market.

For some, of course, turbulent times signal opportunity. And this is certainly true of international buyers who are being attracted in ever-greater numbers due to the weak pound.

These buyers are particularly active in the most sought-after areas of the Cotswolds, Hampshire and West Sussex.

Also being drawn to these key country locations is an increasing number of Londoners. Across the whole of the UK in 2016, Knight Frank saw a 13% increase in the number of country applicants with a London address, compared to the previous year. Knight Frank's head of London Residential, Noel Flint, commented on the reasons behind a move from capital to country: "In general, very few people leave London because they're tired of what the city has to offer.

"Moving out is usually more about what the country can give them and their family at a certain point in their lives. A grand house, a generous garden, good schooling

and a more relaxed lifestyle are some of the most popular reasons given by those moving out.

More rural way of life

"The timing of the moves tends to follow a fairly clear pattern. The first life stage when a move is likely to take place is when the children are reaching primary or secondary school age – so the strategy tends to be: find a good school in the countryside and settle in the area for the duration of their education.

"And the other is retirement – when working in town is no longer an issue it can be a chance to sell the London house and move out to a bigger home and a more rural way of life."

Whatever the trends of the moment, a place in the country will always have its attractions.

The continuing price differential between London and the countryside, the good schools, the improving rail infrastructure, the availability of superfast broadband – they're all factors drawing eager buyers into the green and pleasant land beyond the M25. 🌿

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Test it...



Masterclass on grass

This month it's all about grass as **Malcolm Bates** teams up with a top industry professional for advice on how we can get our lawns back on track...

We've all got our pet hates, haven't we? Mine? Aside from an insidious growth in petty regulations, top of my list is the massive increase in fly-tipping and roadside litter. There's a link, surely? The more rules and regulations involved with getting rid of stuff legally, the more likely people are to dump it in a rural layby. Not rocket science, is it?

But close behind in my 'Pet Hate Hit Parade' is the state of our country's grassed areas - from public parks, council-administered 'amenity areas', sportsgrounds and playing fields, right down to animal pastures and yes, quite possibly, your lawn as well.

There's a common link here, too - lack of maintenance. And while that might not be as easy to spot as the tide of litter that covers the verges of our rural lanes, it adds to the careworn look of Britain's towns and countryside. The same countryside we expect people to come to visit, enjoy and spend money in, remember?

There's always an excuse for doing less-than-best of course. 'Lack of funding', 'Lack of resources', 'Can't get the staff', 'Lack of time', 'Ignorance' - a tricky one this.

Nobody likes to be called dumb, but here's a real-life example. When I asked the manager of a stable yard I once used if it would be possible to scarify and aerate the pastures, his reply was: "There's no need, Malcolm.

The horses eat the grass. We just top it once or twice a year."

End result? After three years, the pastures were full of thatch, buttercups and other invasive species. There was no grass for the horses to eat. So we had to provide field hay. That's dumb.

At this point, you might like to take a long, hard look at your grass. Now, before the new growing season really kicks-in. If the ground is rock hard and the rain doesn't soak in, it needs aeration. If 'the grass' is flat and looks like a badly knitted sweater, you've got thatch issues.

What's to be done? Luckily, I'm not alone. When it comes to turf care, Richard Campey wrote the book on the subject. He's in demand internationally at seminars attended by professional greenskeepers, but he's just as happy to share his knowledge with readers of 'Countryside'.

True, unless you've got large areas of grass, it would be hard to justify purchasing all the kit his organisation - Campey Turf Care Systems - distributes throughout Britain. But you can hire it 'with operator' from specialists. Or if your lawn isn't large enough to take tractor-drawn machinery? Smaller, pedestrian-controlled units are available to do the job. The principles are the same.

First, you're in for a shock

Imants 'Shockwave' rotary soil de-compactor

- Tractor-hitch mounted and (540 RPM) PTO-driven. 2 year warranty.
- Price as tested £10,250.
- Available from Campey Turf Care Systems, Macclesfield, Cheshire. Call 01260 224568 for further product information, demonstration bookings and location of your nearest specialist surface preparation contractor.

Actually, the first job is to develop a strategy. An action plan. You've got to understand the problems, before you can organise the solutions.

But based on my own observations (and I'm not saying my own grass is perfect, by any means) and Richard Campey's professional experience, it's safe to assume that if your grass hasn't benefited from a maintenance regime over the past five years or so (or 'ever'), it will need 'the Full Monty.' That's aerating, de-thatching, re-seeding and sanding/feeding.

Top Tip? "Don't worry that what you're doing is damaging the grass," Richard advises as we unload the kit at a Countryside magazine-friendly golf course near Macclesfield, hitch everything up and sup our early morning brew. "Grass is amazing stuff. The harder you hit it, the better the end-result."

I know Richard is right - I've attended his seminars. But now it's crunch time. After a quick demonstration, it's my turn with the tractor PTO-driven Imants 'Shockwave' unit. Available in three operating widths (1, 1.5 and 2.10 metres), the Shockwave is, technically, a 'linear soil decompactor'. The rotary tines are designed to breath fresh air into compacted soil. Although primarily designed for fine turf and heavily-used sportsfield surfaces, the same principles apply to pastures and well-used gateways.

"Soil compaction is one of the biggest problems we face in the UK," Richard points out. "And until you can get your soil to drain, it won't get the essential bacteria it needs for healthy grass growth."

Boom, boom

The New Holland 'Boomer' compact tractor range was my tractor choice for this test, features include:

- 25 to 50 horsepower. Four-wheel drive. Tight steering lock, standard.
- Synchro-shuttle, or 2/3 range hydrostatic transmission
- Cat 1 rear linkage. Mid/Front PTO on hydrostatic models.
- Three-speed electro-hydraulic PTO (40 & 50 models).
- Front loader/cab options (dealer installed).
- Prices from £11,000 (25hp model)
- More product information from newholland.com/uk



AIR FORCE: Richard Campey checks the degree of soil compaction with a meter after a pass with the Shockwave



GETTING TECHNICAL: Richard helps Malcolm set up the Shockwave's blade depth, and below, a close-up of the rotary tines



VERDICT

The Shockwave is as easy to use as a tractor PTO-driven mower deck, although setting it up does need some care. Working depth is set between 120 and 250mm. The rotary blades are 12mm thick. Operating speed is best set at between 0.5 to 1.5mph. My tractor is a New Holland 'Boomer 50' which, at 47hp, is the most powerful model in the Boomer range. A steady hand was needed to keep things in a straight line, but paradoxically, one of the key features of the Boomer range is the amazingly tight steering lock, making it ideal for other operations like mowing.

Bottom line? The Shockwave did a great job. And I know it's the best bit of kit for the job - because Richard Campey wouldn't risk his hard-earned reputation on anything that wasn't.

Time to hit the thatch

Koro 'Field Top Maker-1200'

- Designed to remove thatch and debris from fine turf. Operating width from 1.20 to 1.60 metres.
- Weight 1,065kgs. Operating depth - up to 50mm. 2-year warranty.
- Price as tested £14,000.
- Available from Campey Turf Care Systems, Macclesfield, Cheshire. Call 01260 224568 for further product information, demonstration bookings and location of your nearest specialist surface preparation contractor.

Right, we've introduced some air into our compacted soil. Now it's time to get rid of all the stuff that invades your grassed areas without you noticing, slowly strangling the healthy sward. Compacted ground that isn't draining properly will encourage moss - which we've just tackled. Now it's time to rip out the rubbish and give the grass the right environment to grow back.

So next up, we have the Koro 'Field Top Maker'. Again, it's tractor PTO-driven - in this case we're using it in conjunction with a New Holland 'Boomer 40' compact tractor. It weighs a tonne - literally. The combination of 40 high-speed rotary digging blades and 70 scarifying blades are designed to break up and rip out the thatch, while also clearing unwanted debris. One of Richard's team sets the machine up and gives me a few tips. He didn't tell me I should never have looked back. Why not?

Because the result looks devastating. Fearing I was going to get a bill for wrecking the golf course fairway, I stopped for a closer look. Carnage. Was



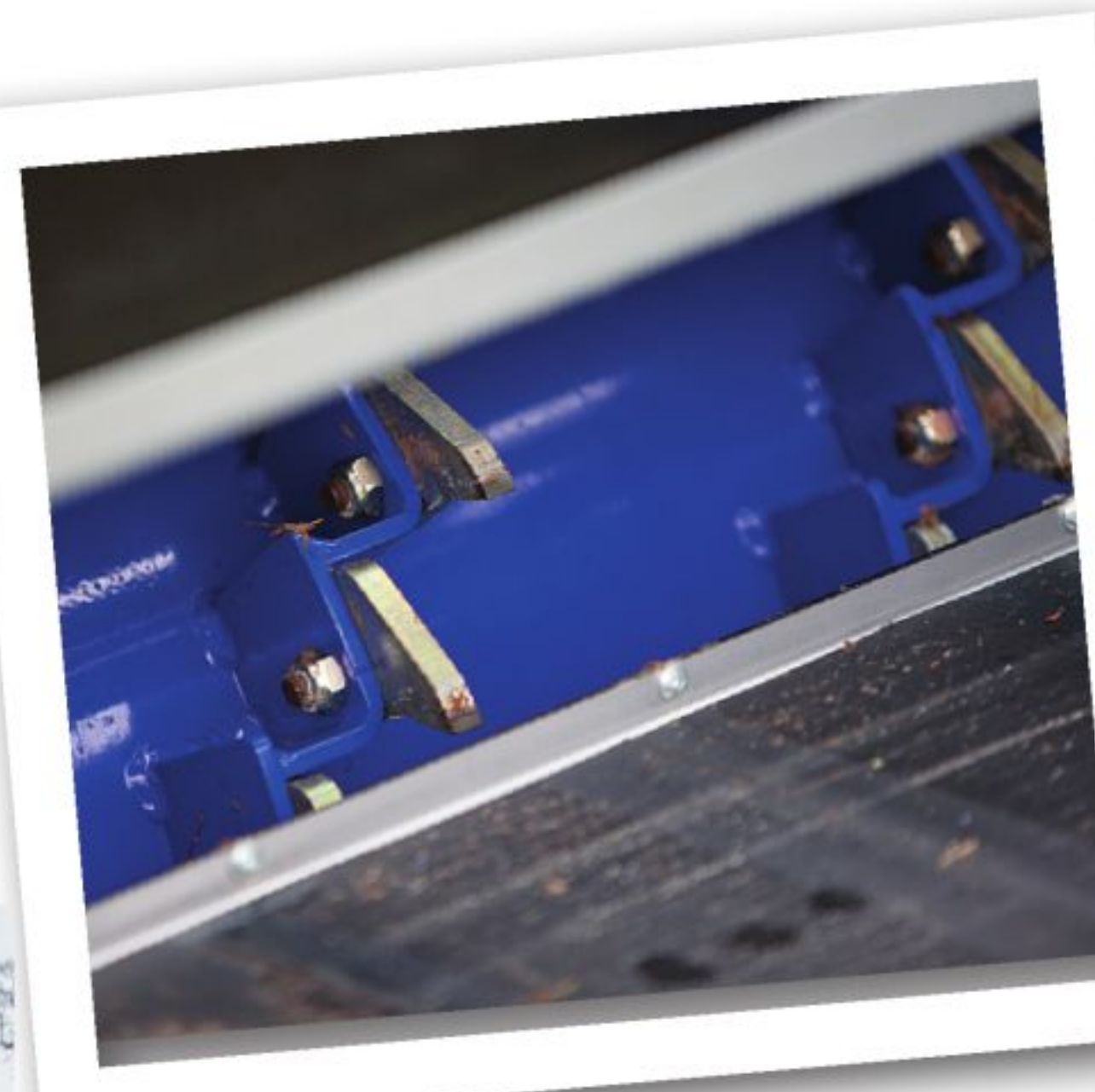
WHAT HAVE I DONE?
Malcolm is concerned he's set the machine too low, and below shows the rotary blades

I running the Field Top Maker set too close to the ground? True, there was no moss, or thatch to be seen - the side-mounted elevator had blasted it all to one side. But there was little sign of any grass, either!

"No, that's about right," Richard assured me. "Like I said earlier, when restoring neglected surfaces, you have to be cruel to be kind."

We assume that anything green is grass. But closer examination revealed it was just a load of moss, thatch and other invasive species that had taken root. It would make sense to run a tractor-trailer alongside the Field Top Maker to collect the debris as it flies off the elevator discharge chute. Or collect it later by vacuum collector. But I was more concerned that we finished the process before the site owner turned up!

"Don't panic. The next process is to re-seed and roll the ground. Then we can add some sand and we're done," Richard adds.



NEAT TRICK: The thatch is ejected by side elevator



NO FEAR: "It's okay. You've got to be cruel to be kind," Richard advises

Finding a contractor

By no means a comprehensive list, these specialist contractors use the equipment featured in this article:

- Fine Turf Services, Knutsford, Cheshire
- Jordan Sports Grounds, Bromley, Kent
- PDS of Worcester
- Souter's Sports, Stirling, Scotland

VERDICT

The Koro Field Top Maker is a top-end professional bit of kit, but as Richard confirms, smaller pedestrian-operated machines are available to do the job. Or? It might make economic sense to employ a contractor as de-thatching should only be required every three to five years. Campey Turf Care Systems supplies kit to a number of groundscape contractors throughout the country.

Now put something back

Vredo 'Super Compact Series' seeder

- Trailer-towable or 3-point linkage tractor-hitch mounted. Working width from 1.20 to 2.20 metres.
- Weight from 660kg.
- Hopper capacity from 135-litres.
- 2-year warranty.
- Price as tested £11,500.
- Available from Campey Turf Care Systems as previously.

With all the rubbish removed and the ground aerated, it's time to put something back. With the surface prepared, the next operation is to boost the grass we have remaining with some additional seeding to give a thick healthy sward. I'm still worried that we've ripped out too much, but as Richard Campey reminds me, grass is resilient stuff and, besides, all the kit we've used is designed for the job.

Even if it looks otherwise at the moment, the 'proper' grass will have come through unscathed and will soon grow back. "Remember to specify how your grassed areas are to be used, when ordering the seed," Richard reminds us. Is your grass just for 'show'? A sportsground surface? Animal grazing? There are dozens of seed mixes available.

I reseeded my lawn a few years ago by 'broadcasting' by hand and using a towed spreader. The Vredo 'Super Compact Series' is in a different class. With a working width of from 1.20 to 2.20 metres (depending on model), it gives uniform 25mm seed spacing and a 'one-pass' result producing, it is claimed, 'almost total seed germination'. The process is completed with a good rolling.



TOP TIP? Order the right seed mix for your grass usage



IMPRESSIVE: The business end of the Vredo

VERDICT

The Vredo can be tractor-hitch, or trailer towed (as tested). Hopper capacity is (from) 135 litres. An operating speed of up to 10mph makes the job a real pleasure. I'm looking forward to revisiting the golf club in a few weeks to see if our restored areas have grown back to rude health.

Dress to impress

Trailer-towable Dakota 412 'Turf Tender' top dresser

- Capacities from 0.75 cubic metres, depending on model.
- Spreading width from 3.5 to 13 metres (variable).
- Electro/hydraulic or manual controls.
- 2-year warranty.
- Price as tested £14,500.
- Available from Campey Turf Care Systems as above.

The final task? Apply the top dressing. The trailer-mounted Dakota 412 'Turf Tender' can apply wet, or dry material. In our case it was lawn sand. The same spreader technology is also available to fit onto an ATV, or a 4x4 pick-up. The unit is powered by the tractor hydraulics, or electro-hydraulic power pack. Top tip? Set the spread-rate correctly.

VERDICT

Time for the warm feeling that comes from a job well done? Absolutely. Again, you might not have the amount of grass - or space - to justify a tractor-based solution, but lawn tractor towable spreaders, or smaller pedestrian-operated units are also readily available.



PHOTOS: IAN MILES AT FLASHPOINT PICTURES

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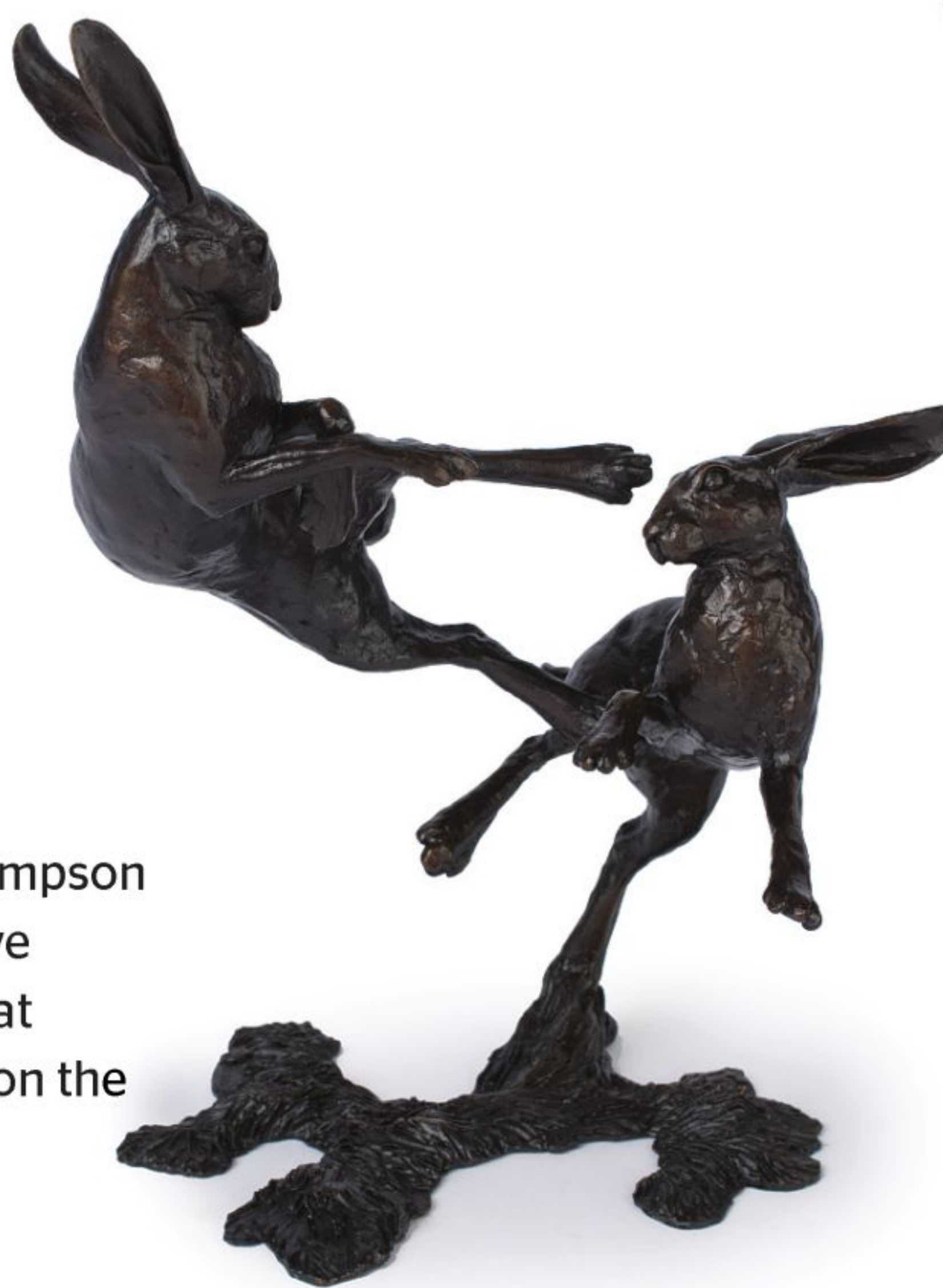
● houseofbruar.com

Boxing hares

This lively bronze hare sculpture by Michael Simpson is a beautifully evocative piece of sporting art that would look handsome on the mantelpiece.

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● houseofbruar.com



Chalk paint

This clever paint by Annie Sloan will instantly upcycle any piece of old furniture, injecting new life into the oldest pieces.

£18.95 1L

● anniesloan.com



Safari chair

You may not be able to bring the weather, but you can inject a piece of the African safari into your home in the UK with a classic folding wood and canvas chair from London gunmaker, John Rigby & Co.

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● johnrigbyandco.com



Feather pen holder

Crafted from male pheasant feathers, the rustic autumnal shades will add warmth to a bedroom, sitting room or office.

£28.75

● furfeatherandfin.com



Prince of the forest

Up and coming artist Coral Rose from Scarborough has created a whole host of beautiful pieces, including this roaring stag. Limited edition print run of 100.

£95

● coralroseart.com



Antler lamp and shade

This lamp features three resin antlers entwined with one another, creeping up the stem of the lamp.

£135

● countryhomeinteriors.co.uk



Ashdown rose cake stand

This Cath Kidston three-tiered cake stand will make the perfect centrepiece at an afternoon tea or the end of Sunday Dinner.

£36

● cathkidston.com

Wooden deer head wall trophy

It may not be quite the real thing; however, this clever wooden wall mount by Clive Roddy will add a quirky touch to the home.

£140

● notonthehighstreet.com



Leather drinks case

Made by The Life of Riley, this is the ultimate leather mini-bar. It's the perfect item to add a touch of class to any shoot day or country picnic and will hold four bottles plus four glasses.

£495

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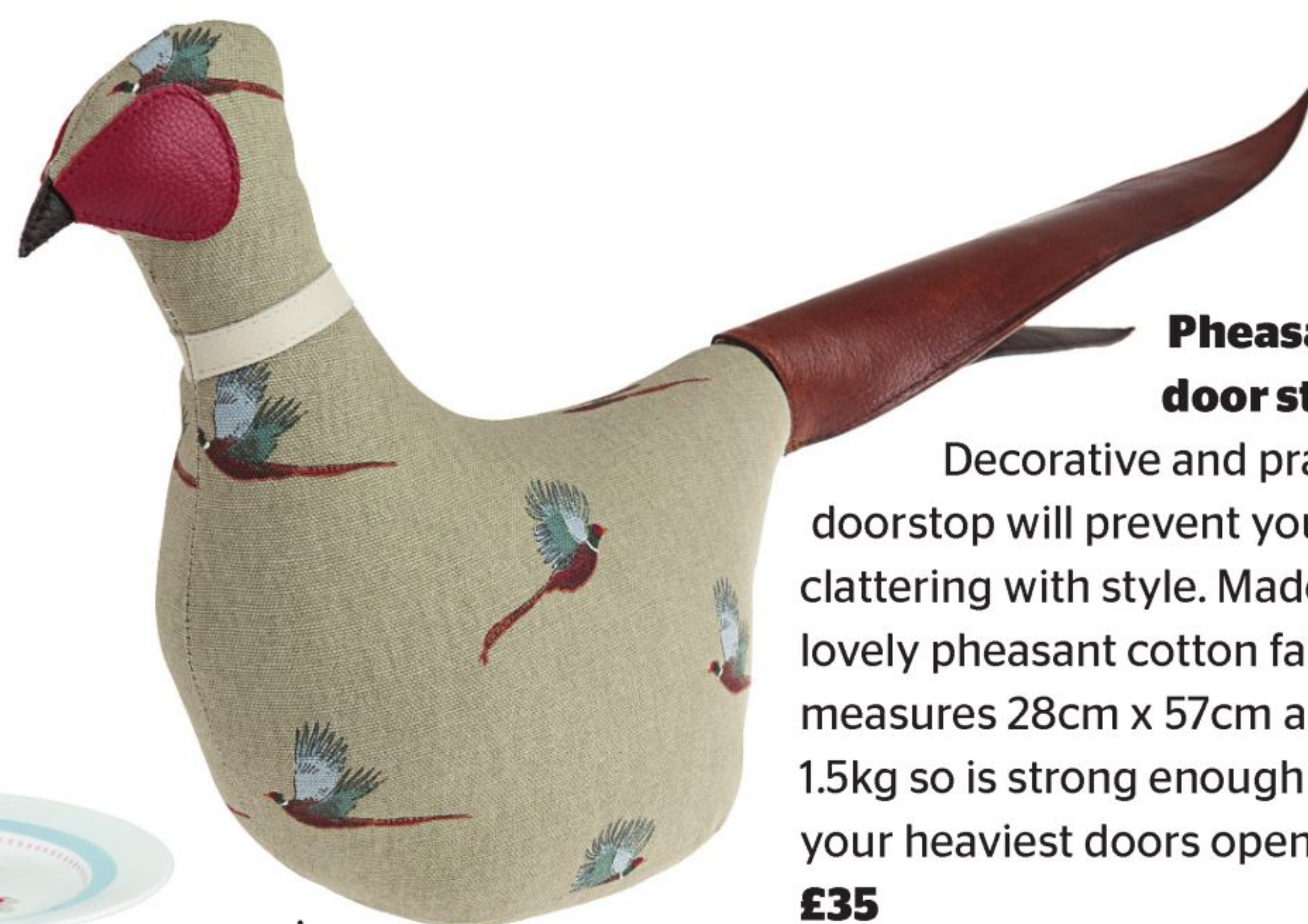


Leather umbrella stand

Store your soggy umbrellas in this stylish tan leather umbrella stand by Ginger Rose.

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Pheasant door stop

Decorative and practical, this doorstop will prevent your doors clattering with style. Made from lovely pheasant cotton fabric it measures 28cm x 57cm and weighs 1.5kg so is strong enough to hold your heaviest doors open.

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● sophieallport.com



Rough shoot glass worktop save

Perfect for any keen shot, this toughened glass worktop surface is ideal for resting hot pans or preparing food, from Countryside Greetings.

£22.50

● countrysidegreetings.co.uk



A cautious look

From nature and fieldsports photographer Glyn Satterley comes some of the most magnificent images to bring into the home. From swooping scenic views of glens to leaping gundogs, there's something for everyone in his vast collection.

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Protect your delicate eggs in this ruby red ceramic egg holder, designed to look like a traditional egg box.

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● liveloughlove.co.uk



Nester pet bed

This soft and squishy pet bed from Joules will help your dog drift off into a deep sleep, with dreams of chasing foxes, pheasants and chickens. The stylish navy blue and red tweed effect of the fabric will sit comfortably in any home while hiding a multitude of dog-induced stains. Available in small, medium and large.

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● joules.com

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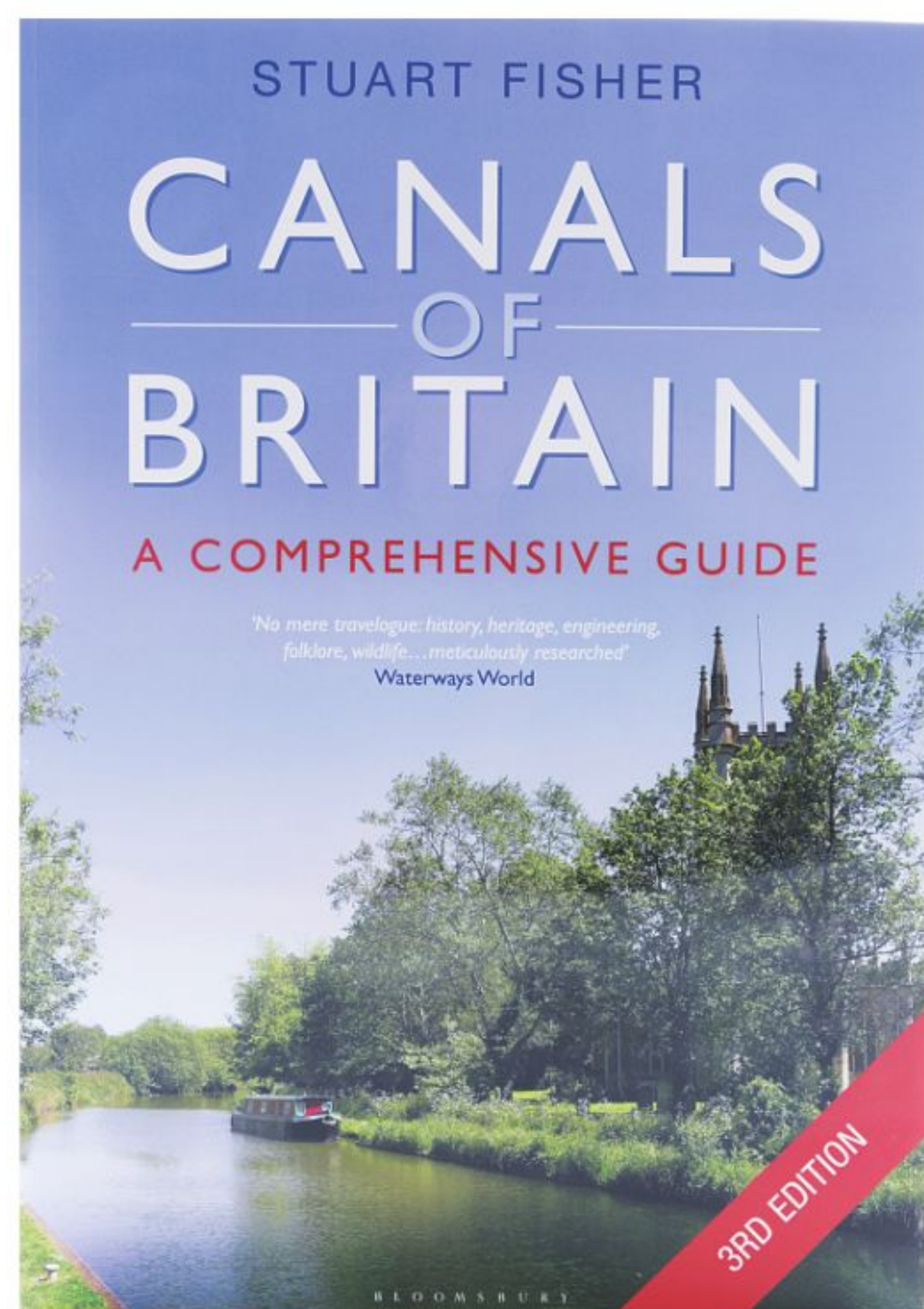


Canals of Britain

● By Stuart Fisher

Published by Bloomsbury,
priced £30 paperback

Canals of Britain is a comprehensive and absorbing survey of the entire canal network of the British Isles. It provides a fascinating insight into the linked-up waterways as well as the isolated cuts and quiet waters which may not be fully navigable by larger craft. Infinitely varied, it passes picturesque open countryside, wild moorland, coastal harbours, historic industrial buildings and abundant wildlife. The author looks at every aspect of canals from construction and history, engineering and even associated folklore and the result is an inspiring, attractive book that will leave you wanting to get out and see these amazing waterways for yourself.

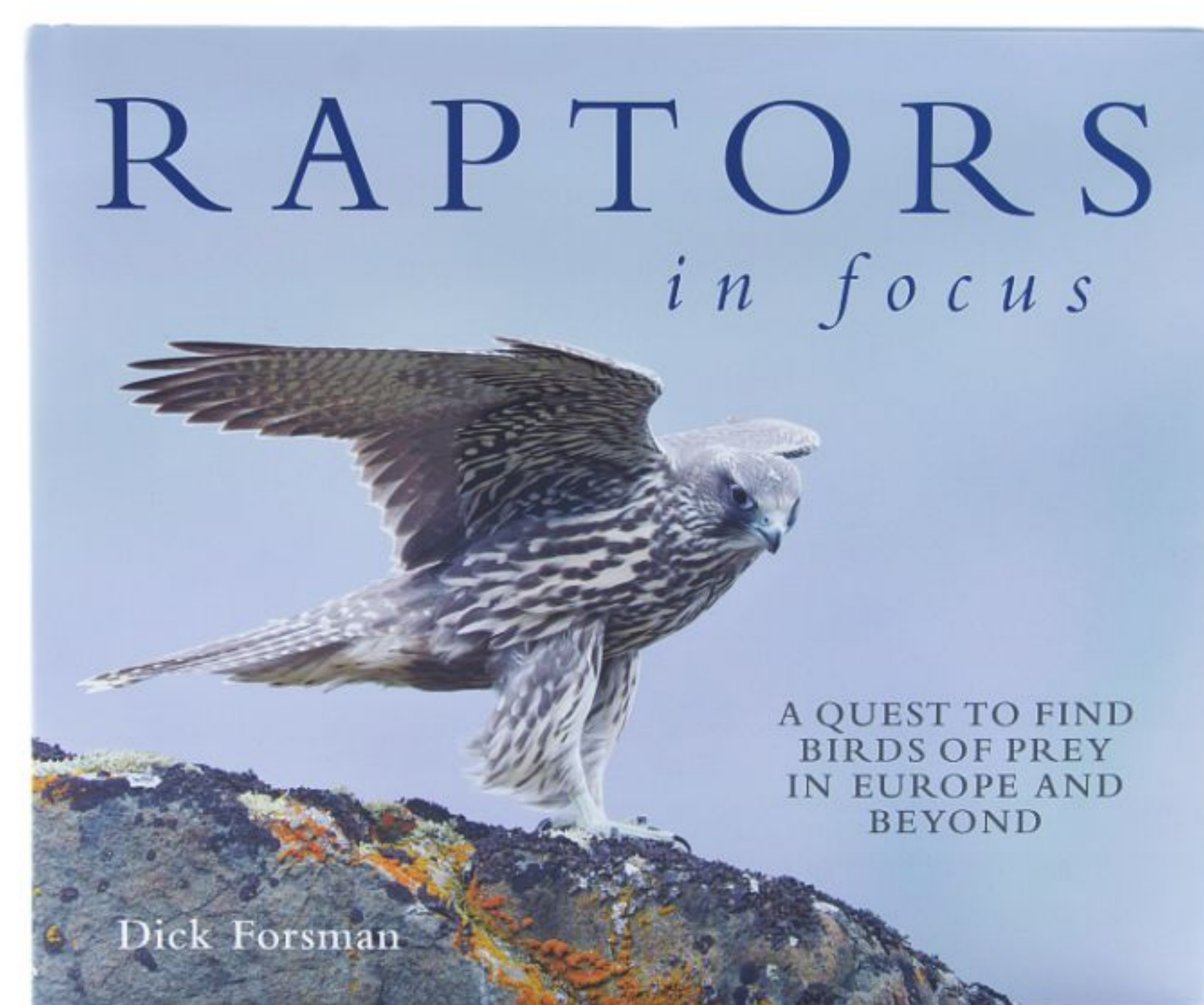


Raptors in Focus

● By Dick Forsman

Published by Reed New Holland,
priced £19.99 hardback

Raptors in Focus is a unique collection of more than 150 images of birds of prey, taken by one of the world's foremost experts in the subject, Dick Forsman. Taken over a 10-year period across the world, the author has captured a host of raptor species, from white-tailed eagles and black kites to the common kestrel. He also looks at the birds' behaviour, giving detailed accounts about migration, hunting, breeding and hybridisation. The book is full of gorgeous photographs that really bring these birds to life into your living room.

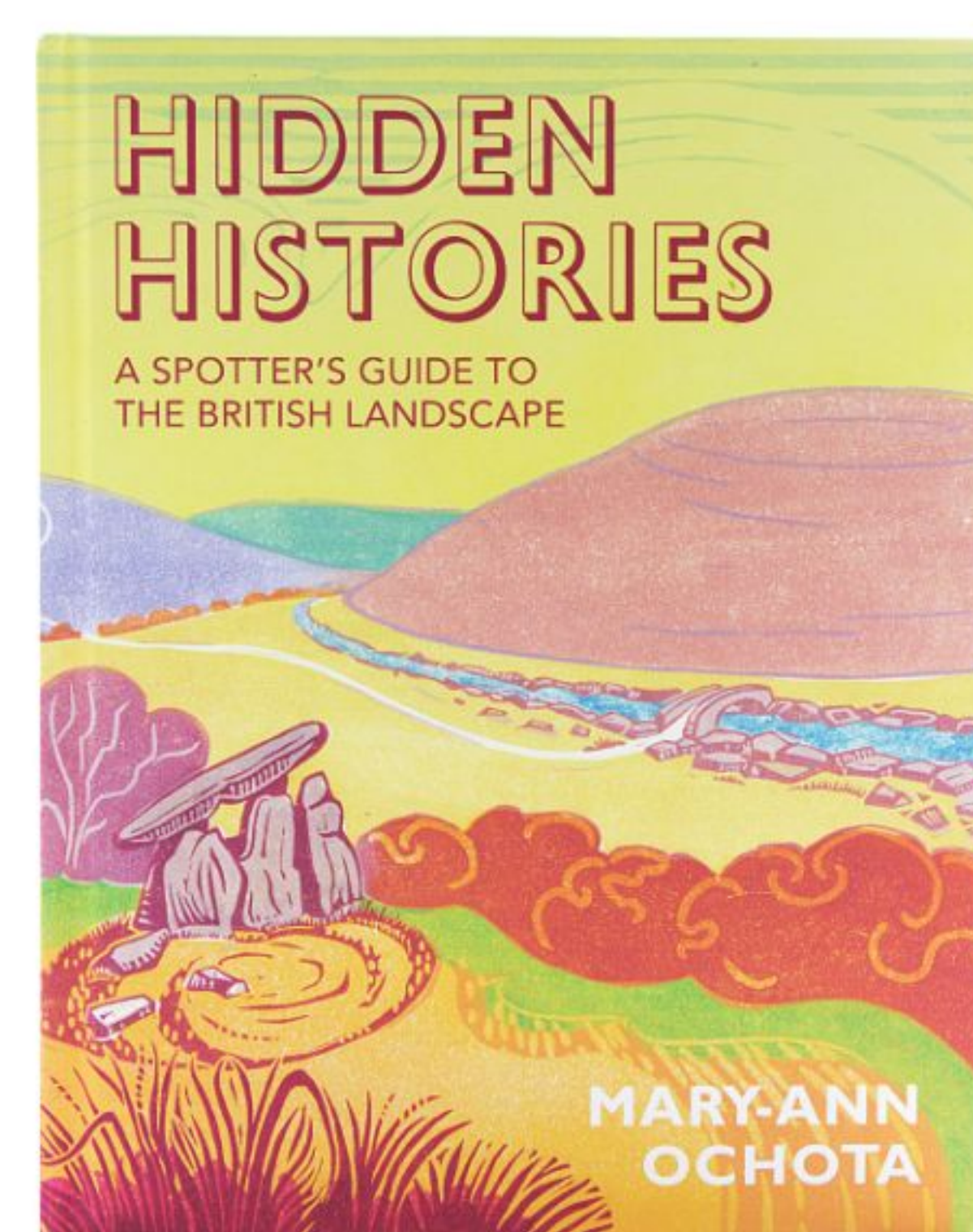


Hidden Histories

● By Mary-Ann Ochota

Published by Frances Lincoln, priced £20 hardback

Entertaining and factually rigorous, Hidden Histories will help you decipher the story of our landscape through the features you see around you. Broadcaster and anthropologist Mary-Ann Ochota arms the amateur explorer with the crucial information needed to 'read' the landscape and spot the human activities that have shaped our green and pleasant land. Chapters include 'Lumps and bumps', 'Stones', 'Lines' and 'Villages' and contain key points to look out for to help you discover old Roman roads, interesting mounds, linear earthworks and ancient hedgerows. Once you start reading, it'll change the way you look at the countryside.

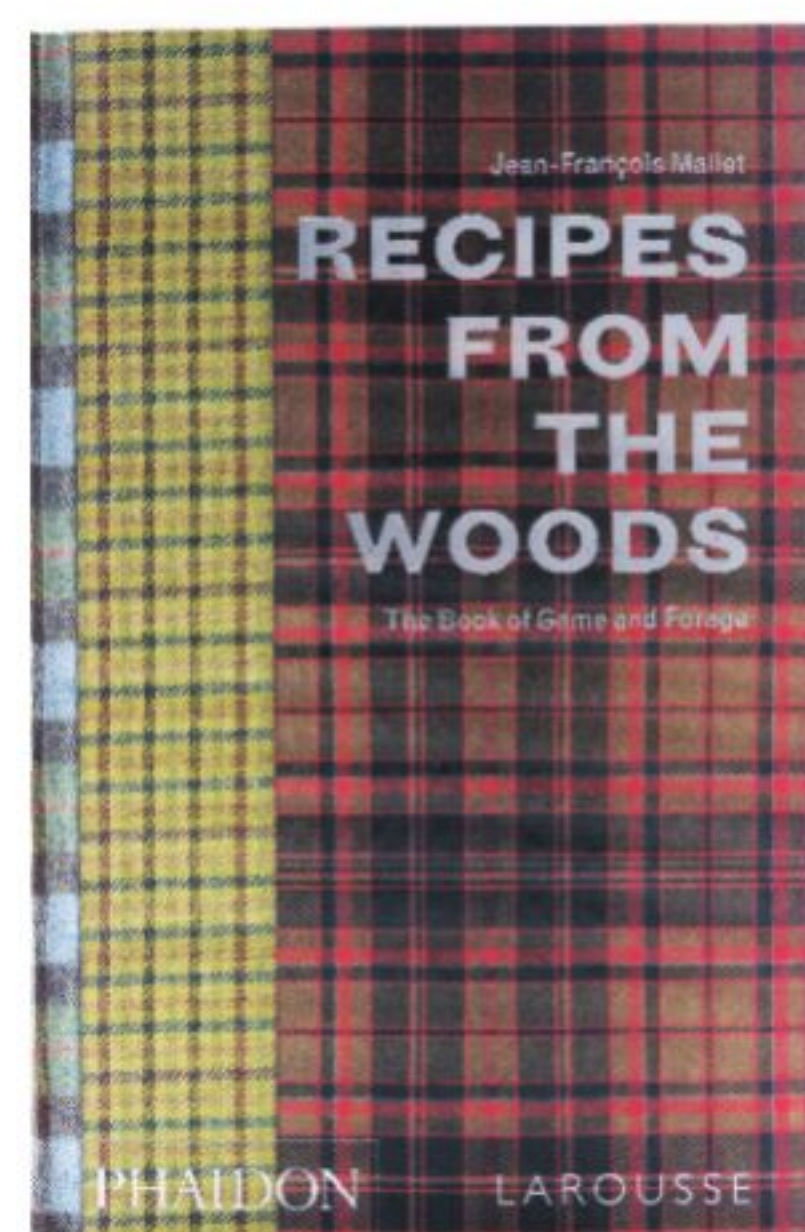


Recipes from the Woods

● By Jean-Francois Mallet

Published by Phaidon,
priced £29.95 hardback

This beautifully-illustrated book is packed full of deliciously evocative recipes with ingredients sourced from the countryside. With 100 dishes to choose from, there's something here for most people to have a go at. Organised into chapters based on food type including furred game (venison, wild boar, hare), feathered game (partridge, pheasant, quail), and nuts and berries – the recipes encourage readers to discover the pleasure of cooking game and wild foods.

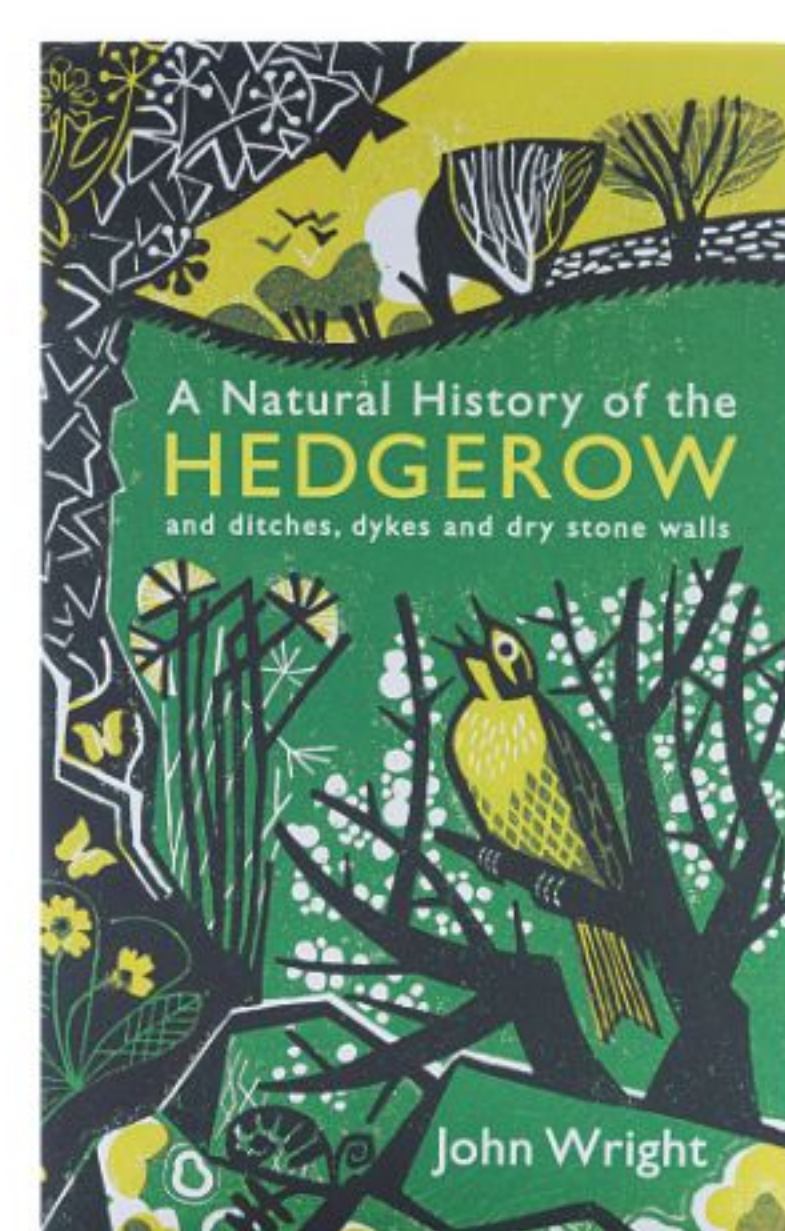


A Natural History of the Hedgerow

● By John Wright

Published by Profile Books, priced £16.99 hardback

John Wright takes a fascinating look behind the garden hedge and into the rich world of hedgerows and boundaries across Britain. He describes their origins and history, the crafts involved in their planting and maintenance, and the huge variety of their shapes, ages, sizes and composition. This is an informative, practical read, but is also entertaining and will open your eyes to something it's easy to take for granted.



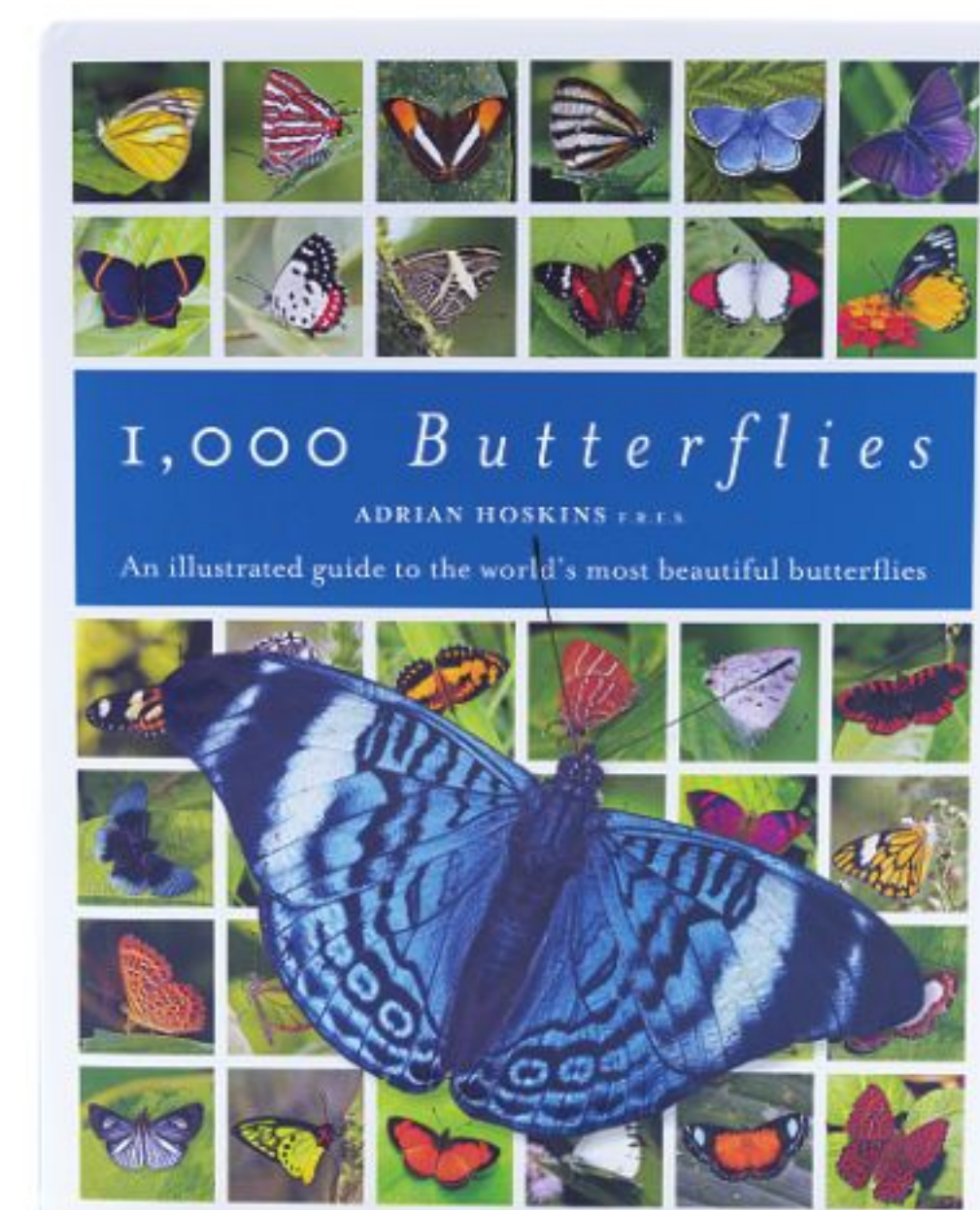
1,000 Butterflies

● By Adrian Hoskins

Published by Reed New Holland, priced £19.99 hardback

Packed with stunning photography revealing the beauty of these amazing insects in intricate detail, this book showcases more than 1,000 species of the world's most beautiful and diverse butterflies.

The book includes photographs of wild butterflies in their natural environment, accompanied by useful text on identification, interesting features and demographic distribution. It's a visual treat and a fascinating journey into a colourful insect world.



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(All Colours Available)

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(All Colours Available)

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The peasant poet

Emily Scaife tracks the meteoric rise and tragic fall of the poet once described as the 'English Burns'

"NO ONE HAS EVER WRITTEN more powerfully of nature, of a real childhood, and of the alienated and unstable self."

If you had to hasten a guess, who do you think this quote referred to? The answer is John Clare – and I'm willing to bet that if this were a question on the gameshow *Pointless*, you'd pick up quite a few points for knowing his name.

Not as well-known as his contemporaries, John Clare was born on 13 July 1793 in Helpston, near Peterborough. His wasn't an easy start – his parents were peasants and Clare became a farm labourer while he was still a child, carrying out tasks such as bird-scaring and tending sheep in order to earn the fee necessary to attend school for a few months every year.

He was born a twin, but his sister only survived a couple of weeks; Clare's biographer Jonathan Bates believed this event would ingrain in the poet a search for something lost, 'something innocent, female, and associated with childhood'. And, judging from the events that would follow, he may well have been right.

Clare's childhood was cut short when his father was struck down by rheumatism. In an attempt to stop his family being evicted from their home, Clare submitted some poems to Edward Drury, a local bookseller, who, in turn, sent them onto his cousin, a publisher whose firm had printed John Keats' work.

Success

Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery was published in 1820 and Clare enjoyed immediate success. Another Clare biographer, Frederick Martin, wrote that the literary world celebrated Clare, who was brought forward 'as the Northamptonshire Peasant and the English Burns'.

"All the critical journals, reviews, and

magazines of the day were unanimous in their admiration of poetical genius coming before them in the humble garb of a farm labourer," Mr Martin said. "The Northamptonshire Peasant was duly petted, flattered, lionized, and caressed and, of course, was duly forgotten when his nine days were passed."

Clare achieved immediate popularity with his verses about provincial life, such as 'The Skylark', which begins:

*"The rolls and harrows lie at rest beside
The battered road; and spreading far
and wide
Above the russet clods, the corn is seen
Sprouting its spiry points of tender
green
Where squats the hare, to terrors wide
awake
Like some brown clod the harrows failed
to break."*

Failure

However, despite his best attempts, Clare would never repeat the success he enjoyed at this point in his life. His muse was the natural world, but in his lifetime it changed beyond all recognition and, as people's interest in it waned, so did their appreciation of his poetry. The poems that the literary circle had once found quaint, became dated.

Clare's work contained detailed references to the land, farming and country practices, but whereas this had once been popular, it's popularity and relevance began to dwindle.

The open fields Helpston had enjoyed were enclosed by the government, bringing about the loss of the commons and eroding the sense of community that wide-open fields had encouraged, littering the countryside with fences, gates and 'no trespassing signs'.

Right from the very start of his poetry career he lamented this loss; 'the golden years', as he called them, were gone even before his life had really begun, and one



gets the sense, right through his career, that he never truly feels as though he belongs in the present. As he writes in 'Helpston', his first published poem: *"These joys, all known in happy infancy And all I ever knew, were spent in thee."* His heart belongs in the past – and the melancholy that ensued would chip away at him for his entire life, with disastrous results.

Descent

Around the time of his success he married a local woman called Martha Turner and together they went on to have nine children. The pressure of supporting his family ate away at him until he was finally admitted to an asylum in 1837. He had retreated into the world of his imagination, believing he had two wives and that he had previously been both Shakespeare and Byron.

Homesick, he escaped, walking 80 miles and living off grass until he reached his family three days later. Slowly but surely he declined, perhaps realising that the 'home' he so desperately wanted to return to no longer existed.

He died in 1864 aged 71 and his remains, which were returned to Helpston, are marked by a gravestone which is inscribed "To the memory of John Clare, The Northamptonshire Peasant Poet" and "A Poet is Born not Made." We can only hope that he finally found his way home. 🐣

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● £79

hicksandbrown.com



Gorse loader skirt

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glorious12thclothing.co.uk

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Made in Great Britain with 100% British wool, this stylish bag is perfect for that short weekend break. It'll carry those weekend essentials or your laptop with ease. With three internal pockets, two pen straps and one internal zipped pocket – it's a beautiful blend of form and function.

● £465-£650

shepherdess.co.uk



Hiho Silver cartridge bracelet

Understated but seriously elegant, this Hiho piece features a sterling silver cartridge top with rose gold centre set on a double leather wrap strap.

● £85

hihosilver.co.uk



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Made from 100% British wool with a satin lining, this classic coat is perfect for everyday wear in either country or city. Designed to be worn over jackets, it's available in two colours: brown and charcoal. Go on, treat yourself!

● £300 (sale price until the end of February)

oliverbrown.org.uk



Farlows Tweed Shooting Cape

This one oozes quality – and with herringbone tweed it's naturally water repellent. Lined with Loden for warmth and comfort, it's perfect for cold, blustery days.

● £499

farlows.co.uk

Timothy Foxx Maud skirt

The stunning Maud skirt in Eliza Tweed is beautifully flattering. It sits just below the waist and creates a lovely figure-hugging pencil skirt silhouette. Falling below the knee, it features a split up to the second button to allow ease of movement, and the false Timothy Foxx buttons down the front create lovely detailing.

● £80

timothyfoxx.co.uk



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fairfaxandfavor.com

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glorious12thclothing.co.uk



The Chelsea in tan

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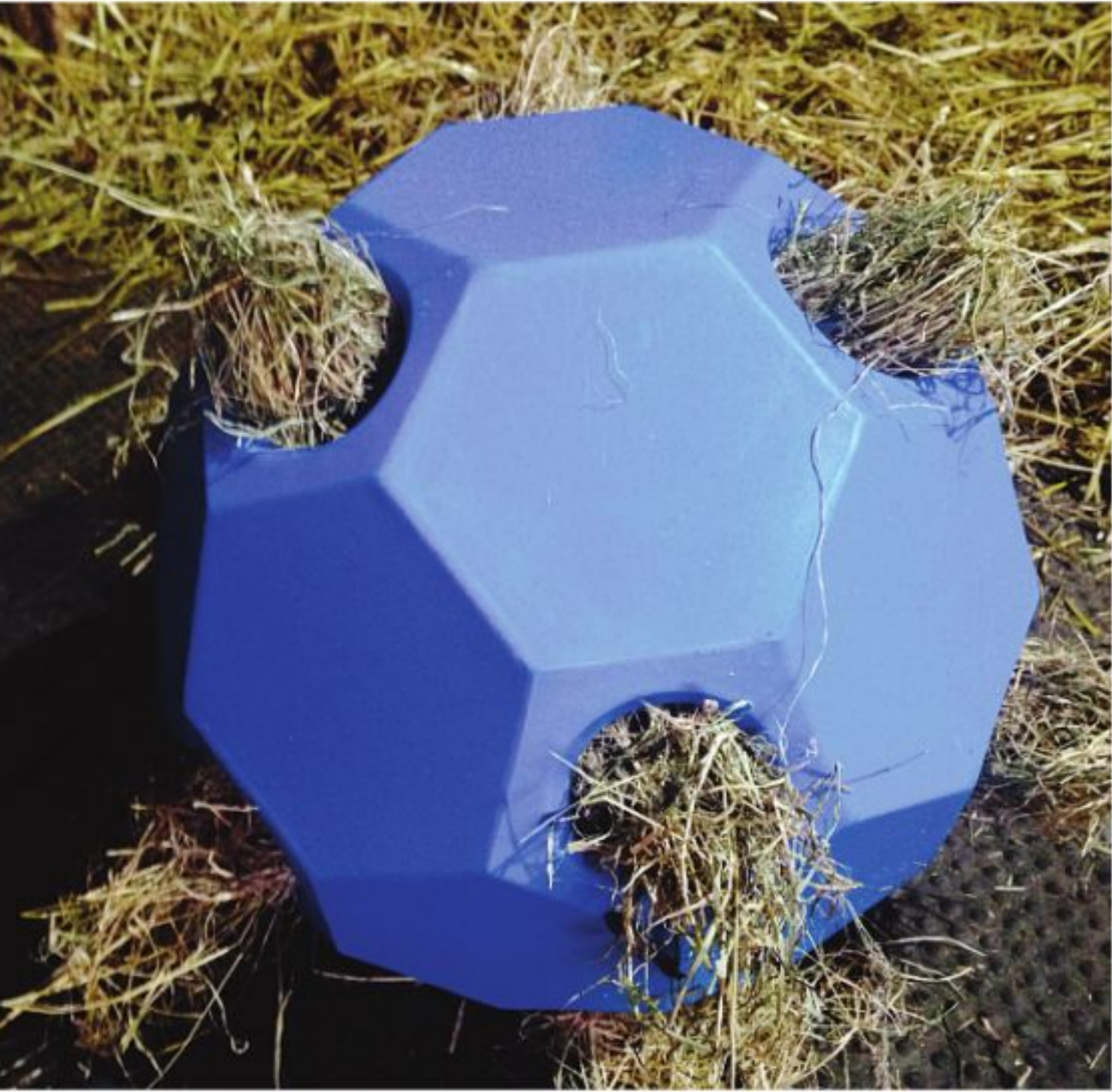
● £195

fairfaxandfavour.com



Ride it...

Seasonal equine kit: winter wonders for under £50, selected by **Melissa Volpi**



Hay Dome
£49.99 from Equine Essential Oils
equioil.com

The Dome holds up to 3kg of hay/haylage and is designed to combat boredom in the stable and makes your horse work for their food.

- What we like...**
- That it helps your horse gain confidence
 - It helps your horse stay active and lose weight
 - It helps keep your horse's mind happy
 - How strong and safe it is

- What could be improved...**
- The feeding holes could be more hand friendly – as it's easy to scratch yourself while freeing up the forage in the feeding holes for your horse

Calm Munch Hay Block
£3.95 from Equilibrium Products
equilibriumproducts.com

The Calm Munch provides your horse with something interesting to chew on that also contains fortified magnesium, B vitamins, camomile, hops and vervain to help promote relaxation. It's useful in stressful situations such as a visit from the vet or farrier.

- What we like...**
- The fact it's low calorie
 - It helps your horse focus and relax
 - That it helps with teething problems

- What could be improved...**
- The munch net – this mini net could do with having a stainless steel ring at the bottom for added safety as well as a shorter tie-up string



Bi-Polar Magnet Browband
£16.99 from Premier Equine
premierequine.co.uk

This browband is designed to help horses stay relaxed when they are at rest.

- What we like...**
- The soft fabric
 - The wide browband
 - It's easy to put on and take off
 - It helps your horse relax

- What could be improved...**
- The size – this browband would be too tight on a horse with a large head



Lavender Liniment
£13.50 from Carr Day & Martin
carrdaymartin.co.uk

A lavender product designed to relax your horse and soothe its muscles.

- What we like...**
- The consistency
 - It helps to relieve tension
 - Also helps with filled legs
 - That it's a versatile, all-in-one product

- What could be improved...**
- The scent – it's the colour of lavender, but it doesn't smell enough of lavender



Equus Health Turmeric
£5.75 for 1kg from Equus
equushealth.org.uk

This product is natural and economical and can be used to alleviate stiffness in your horse, especially during the cold winter months.

- What we like...**
- The economical price
 - That it's palatable, even to fussy feeders
 - It helps with stiffness

- What could be improved...**
- More information on the packaging



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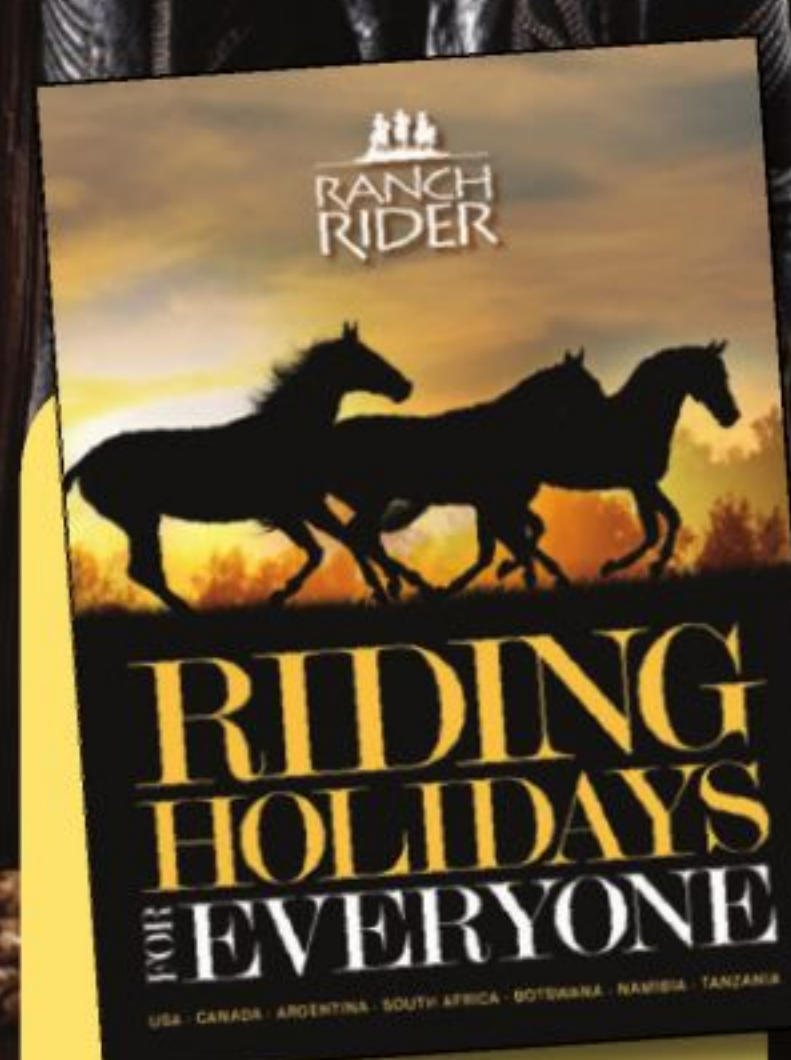
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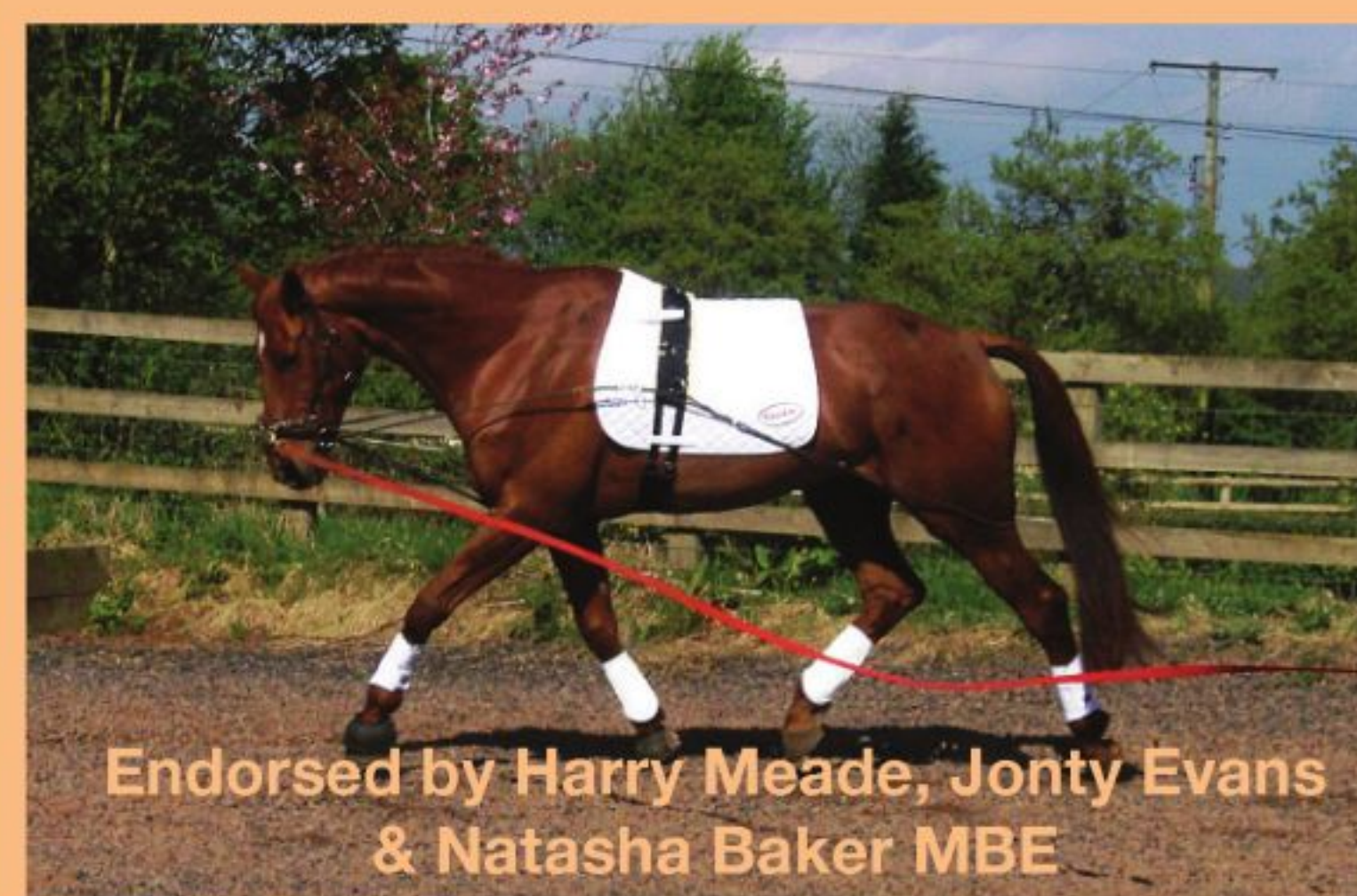
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Eat it...

The great British potato is a hardy vegetable, and was a driving force of the Industrial Revolution, writes **Chad Mulholland**

THE BRITISH have always had a real enthusiasm for the potato. We've roasted them as an accompaniment to our Sunday dinners, cooked them as wedges and chips, blended them into thick, creamy soups, baked them and added them to our summer salads and winter stews.

But no matter how you eat your potatoes, this popular vegetable is seen by many as the 'go-to' comfort food. This sentiment is most probably inspired by the potato's scientific name, 'Solanum tuberosum', since solanum is derived from the Latin word meaning 'soothing'. The potato's name also reflects that it belongs to the Solanaceae family whose other members include tomatoes, peppers and tomatillos.

The potato really is an established part of the British diet. It would be easy to think then, that the hardy spud is a native of our land, but potatoes actually originated in the Andean mountain region of South America.

Researchers have estimated that potatoes have been cultivated by



Indians living in these areas for between 4-7,000 years.

Unlike many other foods, potatoes could be grown at the high altitudes typical of this area, and so became a staple food for these people.

Potatoes were brought to Europe by the Spanish explorers who discovered them in South America in the early 16th century.

While they were consumed by some people in Spain, Italy and Germany, they were not widely consumed throughout Britain. Part of the reason for this was that

people knew the potato was related to the nightshade family, so many believed that it was poisonous.

But, by the 19th century, the potato had become a British favourite. Historian John Reader in his book 'The Potato in World History' even claims that the potato promoted economic development in Britain by underpinning the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century.

It served as a cheap source of calories and nutrients that was easy for urban workers to cultivate in small backyard

Meet the grower

Tim Papworth was born to a farming family in North Norfolk.

As well as producing seven and a half thousand tonnes of potatoes a year, he also grows wheat, winter barley, spring barley, oilseed rape, sugar beet, maize, vining peas, dwarf beans and field beans on 5,000 acres and is the vice-chairman of the NFU Potato Forum.

"We start thinking about next year's crop before we've even finished the current year's crop," says Tim.

"But before we do anything, we get the soils tested and sampled so we know what we're dealing with in terms of nutrient content, usually in the October, and then we plough the soil or leave a stubble, depending on options.

"We then start thinking about fertiliser,



whether it's liquid or solid, and start creating beds and destoning and declodding the soil."

The potatoes are then planted as 'seeds', which are actually tubers, some two in a bed

or three in a bed depending on the market.

Once planted, Tim explains that the tubers are irrigated and that the soil is kept moist so that there are no skin defects on the potatoes. The soil is fertilised again and sprayed against blight.

"After hoping for some sunshine and rain, we start the harvest and desiccation. We don't harvest by hand, we use a Gimme, which is a potato harvester, and after harvesting, we store the potatoes, from October through to April."

Tim grows Innovator, Premier and Royal potatoes, which are sent to McCain's and made into chips, and also Rooster potatoes for Albert Bartlett, as well as a variety called Daisy for Kettle crisps, plus a whole range of other varieties that are used for salads.

"The salads are usually planted in March

Quick Facts

- The potato industry is worth a total of £4.7bn in the UK.
- In Great Britain there are 2,500 potato growers producing approximately 6 million tonnes per year.
- 14% of the entire contribution of Britain's vitamin C comes from potatoes.



plots. And potatoes became most popular in the north of England, where coal was readily available, so a potato-driven population boom provided ample workers for the new factories.

From the Accent (uniform, oval tubers with light yellow skins) to the Zohar (with its good resistance to dry rotting) there are more than 600 varieties of potatoes. Each of these varieties fits into one of seven potato type categories: russet, red, white, yellow, blue/purple, fingerling and petite.

The humble potato is packed full of nutrients, including a variety of vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals that ward off disease and benefit human health, such as iron, phosphorous, calcium, magnesium, and zinc that all help contribute to the building and maintenance of our bones.

The potato really is a vegetable to be praised, and who knows, without it, maybe Britain wouldn't be where it is today.

and are lifted early in August, the chipping potatoes for McCain's are planted early March, maybe even February and are lifted in July.

"Others such as the Maris Piper and Rooster, tend to be lifted in October so they get the maximum length of time in the ground to grow," Tim says.

"The earlier potatoes and the salads go straight to the factory, but we do grade them and make sure that we remove stones and clean them up. When they come out of the store we size them, as well to meet size banding that the contract requires!

"Our potatoes are grown for chipping, crisping, processing and salads for the fresh market. So our potatoes could be in your chips, or crisps - they really could be everywhere!"

Drink it...

Want to build your beer collection? **Melissa Cole** has three corking suggestions

As this issue is all about building and property I thought it would be a good time to tell you about beers you should be popping in the cupboard and waiting to mature – also known as how to build your beer collection. I know this sounds like an odd idea; so much beer is designed to be drunk fresh (so do feel free to buy one to try now and four to try later!), but these beers can be so rewarding when you dig them out for a special occasion or just because you've had a rubbish day at work.



JW Lees Harvest Ale, 11.5%

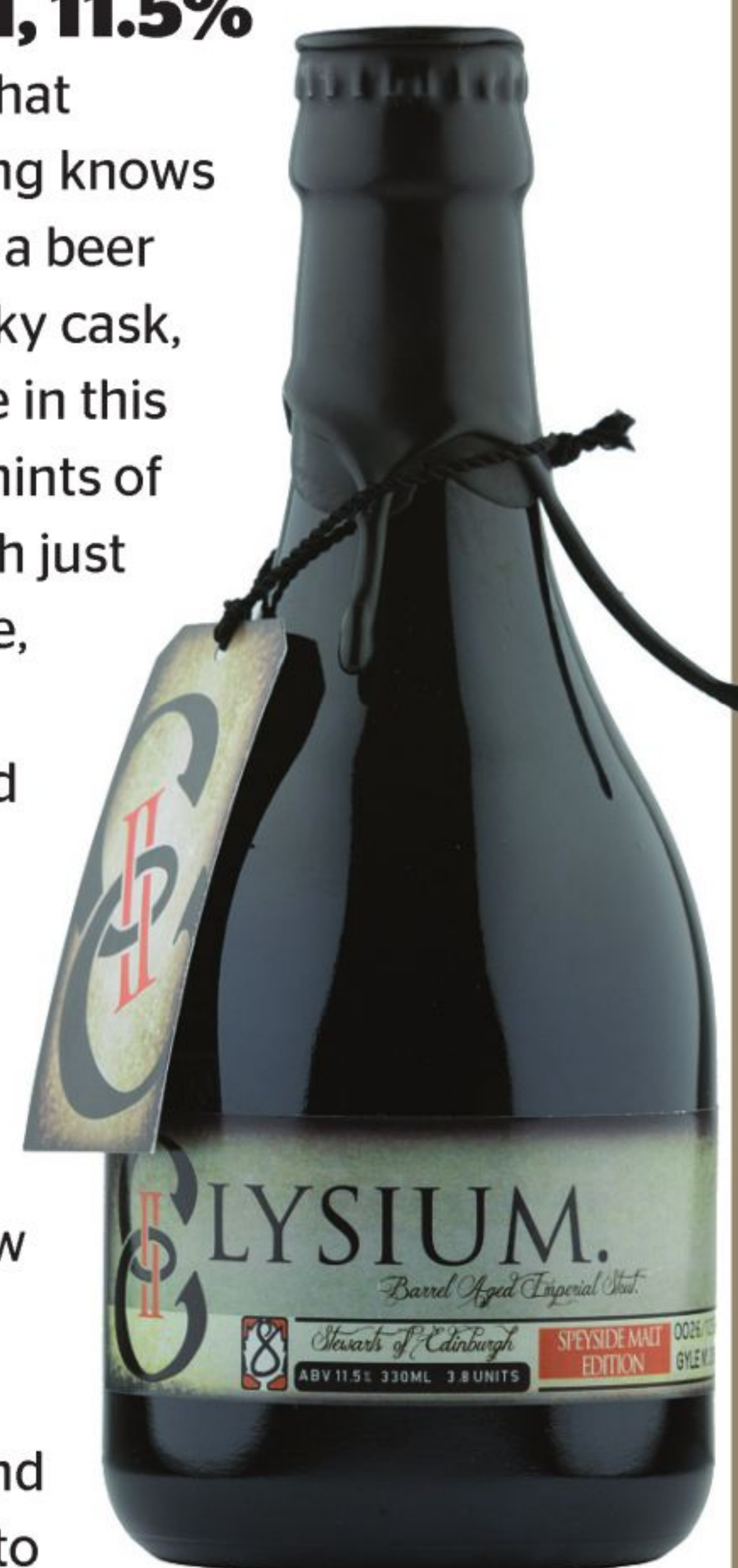
Amazingly, this beer, which sits somewhere between an old ale and a big barley wine, is far more famous overseas than it is here and I'd like to change that. Astonishing enough when it's young, it tastes like your mum has over-boozed the Christmas cake, but it mellows with time to produce heavenly smooth caramel, bourbon, madeira and even minty characters, depending on the stage of oxidation (a positive thing after about three years, between 1-3 years old I am not that big a fan, but I know it will get better with age).

● beersofeurope.co.uk

Stewart Brewing Elysium II, 11.5%

It's fair to say that Stewart Brewing knows how to handle a beer aged in a whisky cask, a Speyside one in this case. Definite hints of sherry and with just a hint of smoke, it has some lovely, rounded red apple flavours and a rich deep chocolate and espresso that will mellow over time to become more harmonious and definitely one to sip by a fireside in a brandy balloon.

● eebria.com



Durham Brewery Imperious, 10.2%

One of the country's most under-rated producers of strong bottled beers, Durham Brewery has produced yet another cracker here and it's only going to get better with age. Currently, it has strong bourbon-aged whisky characteristics and a molasses-led finish, but I reckon over time that will settle down into more mellow liquorice and pear drop characters that will delight the senses when paired with a strong blue cheese and quince jelly.

● durhambrewery.com



Cook it...

The potato is a very versatile vegetable, so courtesy of AHDB's lovepotatoes.co.uk here are three very different but delicious dishes for you to enjoy!



Homemade chips and Cajun-style steak

Preparation time: 5 mins

Cook: 20 mins

Serves: 2

Ingredients

2 large potatoes, cut into thick chips

2 Rib eye, sirloin or rump beef steaks

2 tbsp Cajun spice

1 tbsp olive oil

For the Salsa

1 sliced mango juice and rind from 1 lime

1 sliced peach

Method

- Preheat oven to Gas Mark 6, 200°C, 400°F.
- Place potato chips on a tray with oil and spice seasoning and toss to coat. Arrange the chips in a single layer and bake in preheated oven for about 20 minutes until crisp.
- Preheat the grill until really hot. Cook the steaks under the grill for: 2 mins each side - rare steak; 4 mins each side - medium steak; 6 mins each side - well done steak
- Serve the steak with a fruity salsa - simply chop or roughly blitz the salsa ingredients together, before serving with salad.

Sausage and potato cassoulet

Preparation time: 10 mins

Cook: 25-30 mins

Serves: 4

Ingredients

500g potatoes, cut into chunks

8 sausages

1 tbsp olive oil

2 garlic cloves, crushed

2 onions, sliced

1 carrot, peeled and chopped

½ tsp chopped

rosemary

1 tbsp chopped parsley

1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce

1 tin of chopped

tomatoes

1 tin of haricot beans, drained

250ml vegetable stock

Method

- Place a casserole pot over a medium heat, add half of the olive oil and cook the onions and carrot for 3-4 minutes until soft.
- Meanwhile in a frying pan cook the sausages in the remaining oil until nicely browned.
- Add the potatoes to the casserole pot with the rosemary, Worcestershire sauce and stock.
- Add the sausages to the pot with the tinned tomatoes, haricot beans and parsley and cook with a lid on for 15-20 minutes, stirring every so often.





One pot potato & pork chilli

Preparation time: 5 mins

Cook: 25 mins

Serves: 4

Ingredients

800g potatoes, diced

1 tbsp oil

500g diced pork leg

1 yellow pepper, diced

410g can kidney beans, drained and rinsed

500g jar sauce for chilli con carne

Method

- Heat the oil in a large saucepan and fry the pork and pepper for 5 minutes.
- Add the potatoes, kidney beans and chilli con carne sauce. Wash the jar out with a little water and add to the pan.
- Bring to the boil, cover and simmer for 25 minutes or until the potatoes and pork are cooked throughout. Serve immediately.

Tip

This dish is suitable for freezing, simply thaw and cook until piping hot.



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What's in season now

March brings the start of spring and we're just beginning to see the appearance of salad vegetables such as peppers, as well as some delicious greens



Peppers

Also known as capsicum, peppers are actually a fruit, but are eaten as a vegetable thanks to their savoury flavour. Green peppers are the unripe state of red peppers; yellow and orange peppers are individual varieties bred to be sweeter and milder in flavour. Capsicum peppers are rich sources of antioxidants and vitamin C.



Shallots

Related to the onion, but very much a variety in its own right, the shallot originated in Central or Southwest Asia. They're relatively easy to grow at home; in planting, the tops of the bulbs should be kept a little above ground, and they should not be planted on recently manured soil. The flavour of a shallot is milder and sweeter than that of an onion and the lower water content means they need more gentle cooking.



FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY
Apples			
		Asparagus	
	Aubergines		
Beetroot			
			Broad beans
Brussel sprouts			
Cabbages			
Carrots			
Cauliflowers			
Celeriac			
Cucumbers			
Leeks			
Onions			
Parsnips			
Pears			
	Peppers		
Potatoes			
		Radishes	
			Raspberries
Rhubarb			
		Rocket	
			Spinach
		Spring onions	
		Strawberries	
Swedes			
Tomatoes			
Turnips			
		Watercress	

* For the full seasonality chart, visit the Back British Farming section at nfuonline.com

Spring onions

Spring onions, or scallions, are actually white onions, harvested at a young age. They're not only related to garlic, leeks, shallots and chives, but also the lily. There are references to spring onions in Chinese literature dating back over two thousand years. Go for spring onions with firm, unblemished bulbs and bright green leaves to ensure freshness and flavour.



Purple-sprouting broccoli

Purple-sprouting broccoli was initially cultivated by the Romans. It's especially good when young and tender. Look for darkly coloured specimens with crisp stalks, which snap cleanly when broken. The sprouting types are easy to grow, prolific and extremely hardy, and are overwintered for harvest in spring.



Spinach

Used in almost every cuisine across the world, spinach is enormously popular and has one of the shortest cooking times of any vegetable. 'Spinnedge' featured in the first known English cookbook, the 'Forme of Cury' (1390). Packed with Vitamin A and iron, wine fortified with spinach juice was reputedly given to French soldiers in WW1 if they were weakened by blood loss.



What to look out for

Buying British can be easier said than done, so here are two simple ways to help you look out for British produce and support the industry. You can also cut out and keep this simple guide.

- Take a close look at labels and look for the country of origin on the packaging, rather than just where it's processed.
- The Red Tractor logo is a guarantee that you're buying quality food and drink produced by British farmers.



A grand design

From falling down to fabulous, **Lorna Maybery** talks to **Sarah Callander Beckett** about the ups and downs of restoring a historic abbey

RENOVATING A HOME is a difficult task at the best of times. But when you have a Grade I-listed building and the work is estimated to cost millions, it adds a whole new layer of problems.

For Sarah Callander Beckett it was a challenge that she and her husband, Peter, relished – even if it did take nearly 20 years to get from virtual ruin to luxury boutique bed and breakfast and wedding venue.

Sarah inherited Combermere Abbey in 1992. Situated in the Cheshire countryside, it has been the family home and estate for the past 100 years and has a chequered past. The abbey began life as a Cistercian monastery in 1133. Following the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII, it was rebuilt as a Tudor mansion and, in the late 1820s, remodelled in the then-popular Gothic style by Sir Stapleton Cotton. It also has a number of Royal associations, having being visited by both King Charles II and William of Orange.

Sarah had been working in New York in PR when the house became hers, so taking on a huge renovation project was very much outside her comfort zone. But if the work was not undertaken, parts of the house were in danger of collapsing.

“There were seven buildings that came with the house that needed work, and the North Wing of the house was structurally unstable and was posing a real risk to the rest of the Abbey,” explains Sarah.

“Combermere is incredibly important historically and it would have been a tragedy if it was lost. You get the really grand houses such as Blenheim and the like that have huge investment and are taken on and looked after, but there are a lot of smaller, still important houses that need preserving but don’t have the money or the resources. It’s these, like Combermere, that need the most help.”

Sarah was determined to save the house and preserve its heritage, but also needed to make the 500-acre estate pay. Dairy farming was and still is a big part of the business, but for the long-term, Combermere needed something that would see it thrive for decades to come.

The decision was made to invest in holiday accommodation and Sarah’s initial job was to transform the stables into nine cottages.

“I am definitely a people person and wanted to invest in something that I knew about. I have worked in the hospitality industry and spent a few years working with Bernard Ashley after the death



LIGHT AND BRIGHT: The downstairs sitting room is decorated with inviting colours; before the work it was in a state of disrepair

of his wife, Laura, opening a series of hotels in the US,” she says. “Opening as a holiday venue, which no-one else had done in this area at the time, was a risk, but it has proven to be the right direction to take.”

As work got under way on the cottages, and the outhouses were transformed into offices, Sarah also set about gaining planning permission to renovate the North Wing of the Abbey itself. The wing had not been lived in since the 1950s and was deteriorating rapidly so needed urgent attention. Getting both the funding and the planning permission took her down a long and rocky road that would take nearly 13 years to finally gain approval and the money needed for the project.

The final go-ahead arrived in 2014, and thanks to funds raised through a permitted development and grants from English Heritage and the National Trust, work was finally able to start on the North Wing.

“The cost was close to £2m for the work and the only way we could bring it in under budget was for my husband Peter to be site manager,” explains Sarah. “We had an excellent project manager and I was also very involved from the beginning. We’d had the wing under scaffold for a long time, and had to put in extra support to prevent one side from collapsing.

“Once we started work, we realised it wasn’t going to be straightforward,” Sarah adds. “It wasn’t a simple job, as behind the Gothic walls was a Tudor building, complete with oak beams and wattle and daub walls.

“It seems that Lord Combermere decided he wanted to build a Gothic house in the style of the day in the 1820s, so decided to pull the whole lot down. He began the work, but ran out of money. So instead of making a new house, he actually enveloped the old Tudor mansion with a new Gothic front.

“Once we took down the outer walls we could see the inner Tudor section, which was riddled with woodworm and death watch beetle. The whole upper floor was so rotten it had to be taken out.

“We stripped back the North Wing to its medieval and Tudor frame, replaced the old roof, and added new Gothic cladding.

“We used a father and son team of expert joiners who lived on site for months, and we also enlisted the help of artisan craftsmen in lead work and roofing.”

Over a two-year period, the North Wing was brought back to life and sympathetically rebuilt, and once the structure was sound and the interiors repaired, Sarah could enjoy the more artistic side of the job – the interior design.

She had the help of well-known British interior designer and personal friend Nina Campbell.

“We worked together on mood boards for each room and come up with ideas that would fit with the Gothic style but feel contemporary and glamorous.”

The result is luxurious boutique bedrooms with sitting and dining rooms, which can be booked separately as bed and breakfast accommodation, ►



CHALLENGING: Sarah and Peter Callander Beckett took on the enormous project of saving the North Wing of Combermere Abbey

TRANSFORMATION: The front of the North Wing before and after the work was carried out

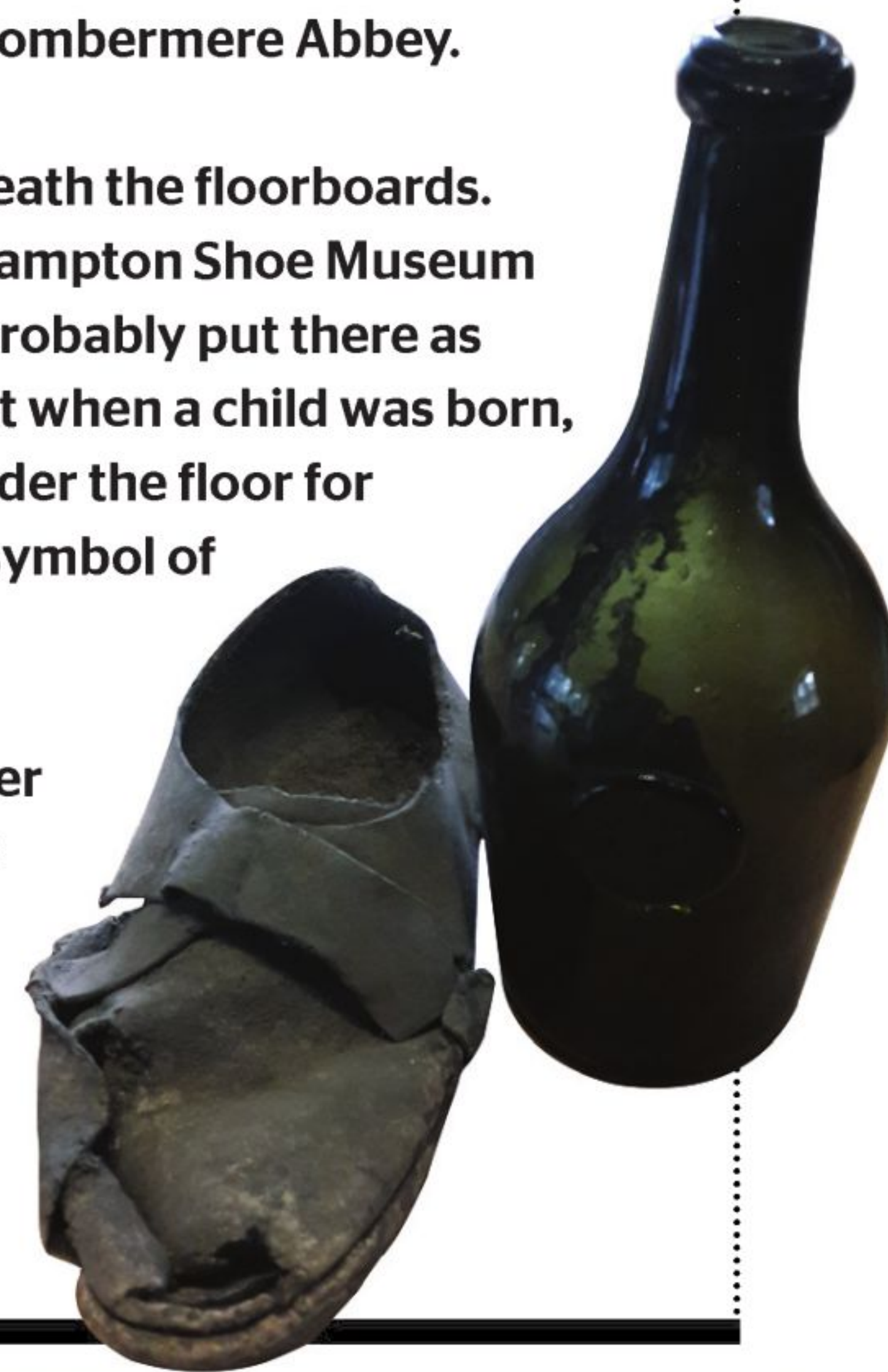
Fascinating finds

During the renovations, a number of fascinating objects were discovered in walls and beneath floorboards.

● A Papal bull in perfect condition made of clay was uncovered by a local metal detecting club by chance as it was buried beneath a piece of lead. Papal bulls were used to seal documents from the Vatican. Pope Innocent IV, who became Pope in 1243, attached this particular papal bull to a notification sent by Combermere Abbey.

● A shoe hidden beneath the floorboards. “I took it to the Northampton Shoe Museum and they said it was probably put there as part of a tradition that when a child was born, a shoe was placed under the floor for good luck. It’s also a symbol of fertility,” says Sarah.

● An 18th century beer bottle intact, that has the stamp of the original owner, one of the members of the Cotton family.



CLASS Q – AGRICULTURAL BUILDINGS TO RESIDENTIAL DWELLINGS – UPDATE

Class Q of the Town & Country General Permitted Development (England) Order 2015 which allows agricultural buildings to be converted to dwellings continues to give rise to varying interpretations particularly around the structural issue.

Schedule 2, Part 3 Changes of Use, Class Q1(i) of the order allows for the *'installation or replacement of windows, doors, roofs or exterior walls; or water, drainage, electricity, gas or other services to the extent reasonably necessary for the building to function as a dwelling house; and partial demolition to the extent reasonably necessary to carry out building operations'*.

The structural requirement is detailed within the Planning Practice Guidance which states:-

'Building works are allowed under the change to residential use. The permitted development right under Class Q assumes that the agricultural building is capable of functioning as a dwelling. However, it recognises that for the building to function as a dwelling some building operations which would affect the external appearance of the building, which would otherwise require planning permission, should be permitted.'

However, it goes on to say *'It is not the intention of the permitted development right to include the construction of new structural elements for the building. Therefore it is only where the existing building is structurally strong enough to take the loading which comes with the external works to provide for residential use that the building would be considered to have the permitted development right.'*

You will note above it states *'it is not the intention of the permitted development right to include the construction of new structural elements'*. This has led to confusion especially in terms of roofs and walls. One recent case handled by Acorus was

refused due to the proposed infilling of one wall on a brick and slate roof building which in all other aspects was a sound building.

The debate we believe has however moved on following the recent High Court decision known as the 'Hibbitt' case reference CO/3360/2016. This has been widely reported but effectively involved a challenge of a Government Inspector's decision to refuse conversion under Class Q of an open sided simple agricultural building.

The Court agreed with the Inspector. However, the decision is perhaps more helpful that it might first appear as the debate centred around the concept of 'conversion versus new build' or as stated in the decision 'fresh' build. It would therefore seem that the bigger picture of whether the proposal is a conversion or not is more important than looking at individual elements of the proposal and whether they are structural.

Decision notices from Local Planning Authorities will no doubt continue to be affected by the Hibbitt case but whether these will 'stand up' to varying interpretation is yet to be known.



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TOP LEFT AND RIGHT: Salamanca, the bridal suite, looks stunning now compared to the room before the work

ABOVE LEFT AND RIGHT: Bhutphore is now a beautiful room after extensive renovation

LEFT: The private garden in front of the North Wing

BOTTOM: The joiners spent months working on the project

or together for exclusive use of a bridal party.

The North Wing now has its own dedicated entrance, with an elevated terrace overlooking the private garden. There's a formal dining room and on the first floor are two bedrooms, including the bridal suite, 'The Salamanca', which boasts a super king-sized bed and a stunning en-suite bathroom, featuring an oversized free-standing bath.

Also on this floor is the Tudor study with original 400-year-old oak beams, which have been left cleverly reversed into the plasterwood so visitors can see a little of the original Tudor house behind the Gothic façade.

"I have loved the challenge of this project. I've had fantastic support from my team that work with me on the estate, and my husband Peter who has project managed it. This was a challenge I wasn't prepared to give up on. It will be sustainable and is an exciting renaissance for the building." 🌿

Further information

Combermere Abbey is an award-winning business with self-catering accommodation and a wedding venue, as well as the new B&B in the North Wing. Prices for the North Wing are £140 per room, based on 'Bhutphore' and £155, for 'Salamanca'. The rooms can be booked together to secure exclusive use of the wing for up to four guests.

For further information, visit: combermere.co.uk

Going once...

Ever fancied buying and selling at auction? Well, it's easier than you might think as **Lorna Maybery** discovers



Words by:
Lorna Maybery
Lorna is Countryside's deputy editor who loves exploring the great outdoors

THANKS TO PROGRAMMES like Homes Under the Hammer and Bargain Hunt, buying items at auction has become much more accessible to the normal man on the street.

Whether it's a house, an antique wardrobe or vintage wine, there isn't much these days that can't be bought at auction. And thanks to technology, the process is even easier and you don't even have to be in the same country, let alone the same room as the auctioneer.

But if you do want to see the products for yourself, there's ample opportunity to visit an auction house and have a good browse around. Most auctioneers will have open days allowing potential customers to explore all the items on offer in their catalogue.

Tori Billington, from auctioneers Dreweatts Bloomsbury, who are based at Donnington Priory in Newbury, says: "Anyone can come in. If you want to bid, you just sign in at the front desk and if you haven't bought with us before we just take some ID and you're given a bidding paddle. But if you just want to view you can come straight in and look around. It's completely free to browse."

Auctions are held regularly throughout the year, with different themes. During my visit they were preparing for an interiors auction, which includes furniture, glass, porcelain and art.

"We have two tiers of furniture sales, so interiors is our lower tier, priced at around £300-£400 upward and then three times a year we have a fine furniture sale, which is the more expensive stuff. The same happens with jewellery, so three times a year we have our top priced fine jewellery sales.

"Depending on the item and the value we will allocate items to a particular sale. The interiors includes furniture, ceramics, glass, rugs, lighting, pictures, not top end, but priced around the £500 mark with some a bit more and some a bit less. These auctions are a good introduction for first timers."

So how do you go about buying and selling items at auction? The process for both is very straightforward, says Dreweatts senior valuer and auctioneer Richard Madley. Richard, pictured left, has been in the business for more than 40 years and has appeared on the BBC TV show Bargain Hunt for the past two years.

Buying at auction

He advises people to get comfortable with the whole auction process before they start buying or selling.

"I think people should make a point of attending auctions without actually buying anything. Get comfortable at your local auction house, view the sales. It's free, you can have a look and talk to the staff and see what's coming up and just sit down and watch the auction. It's a great opportunity to view things and learn about the different items."

If you have a good look around and decide there are items you want to bid on, then you will need to register for a paddle number with the auctioneer.

"You are now a number and you hold a up your paddle when you bid, and, at the fall of the hammer, I will ask you to keep that number up and I will call that out.

"The old stories about coming in and scratching your nose and buying a grand piano is just myth, things don't work that way these days.

"You've now entered into a legal contract. I'm



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Potassium (ppm)	236	191	Normal	(Index 2.8) Adequate level for grazing system.
Magnesium (ppm)	260	61	High	(Index 4.8) Possible interference with availability of Potassium.
Calcium (ppm)	1484	2000	Low	If pH low use Calcium Limestone.
Sulphur (ppm)	7	10	Low	Consider treatment for optimum grass growth.
Manganese (ppm)	27.2	20.0	Normal	Adequate level.
Copper (ppm)	6.1	8.0	Low	PRIORITY FOR EQUINE NUTRITION (see comments below).
Boron (ppm)	1.09	0.50	Normal	Adequate level.
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Molybdenum (ppm)	0.03	<0.50	Normal	Adequate level.
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acting as an agent of the vendor and you're obliged to pay for the goods. In the old days, they would take a 10 per cent deposit off you. These days most people pay and collect there and then, as they want the goods immediately."

But Richard adds that you must remember that whatever price you bought your item for is not the full amount you will need to pay.

"You have to pay, in addition to the hammer price, an auctioneer's charge, which is a buyer's premium and this varies from auction houses, but is usually between 15 and 30 per cent plus VAT. Be very aware. What you bid is not what you pay. It will be printed in the front of the catalogue what the buyer's premium is."

Also, don't forget that these days you're not only bidding against the people in the room, but also with buyers from around the world, so the competition could be a lot fiercer than you realise. And if you want to be an online bidder you can simply visit the auctioneer's website and register. The sale can be viewed live as cameras are in place to ensure the auctioneer and the items being sold are clearly visible.

Tori adds: "You might only have 20 or 30 people here physically, but people are bidding all over the world. We have space for staff taking the telephone bidding and for staff monitoring the online bids."

Selling at auction

So what do you do if you have something you believe is worth selling at auction?

"Firstly, get your phone out, take a photo,



TOP: The showroom at Dreweatts where you can browse the antiques and art on offer

ABOVE: Art work from the Ellis Collection is collated by expert Lucy Gregory at Dreweatts Bloomsbury

measure the item if it is a picture, and email this to your local auction house and, with a number of caveats, they will give you an idea of what that item is worth," advises Richard. "Anyone can write to an auctioneer and get a free valuation. If the auctioneer sees you have nice things he will be on to you and arrange to see you and talk about selling."

They may also advise on when is the best time to sell certain items. "Some auctioneers have specialist sales so, for instance, silver and jewellery is better in this type of sale. It used to be quieter in the summer so people used to like the sales in June and October, but that's less the case now."

There are also fees for selling your item and Richard says you should shop around for the best deal. "If you have a good painting or piece of furniture then auctioneers will be interested and you'll get three different prices and selling terms.

"The value of what you're selling will influence what the auctioneer will charge you. A standard selling term might be 15 per cent plus insurance – you need to be insured whilst on the premises and this will cost 1.5 per cent – and then for a photograph in the catalogue you can pay anywhere between a fiver and £50. Add some VAT, so reckon on about 20 per cent of the auction price. So if it sells for £200 you'll get a cheque for £160.

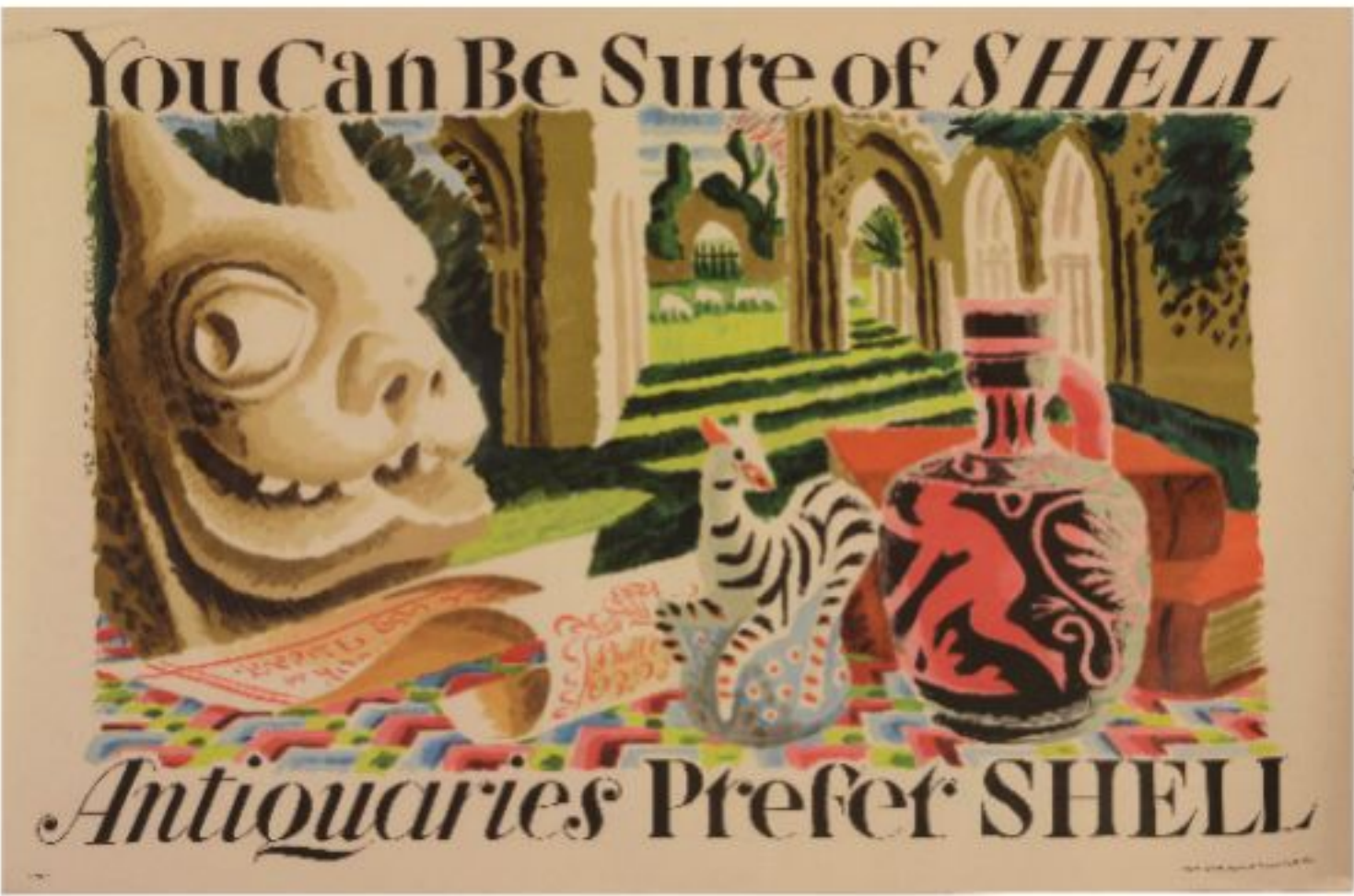
"People say that seems a lot and I say what are the alternatives? Ebay may be cheaper, but it doesn't have the expertise."

● For more information, visit: dreweatts.com

AUCTIONS

Lots to choose from

Here's a few of the items sold at a recent auction at Dreweatts. The auction was for interiors and included the collection of the late Clifford and Rosemary Ellis.



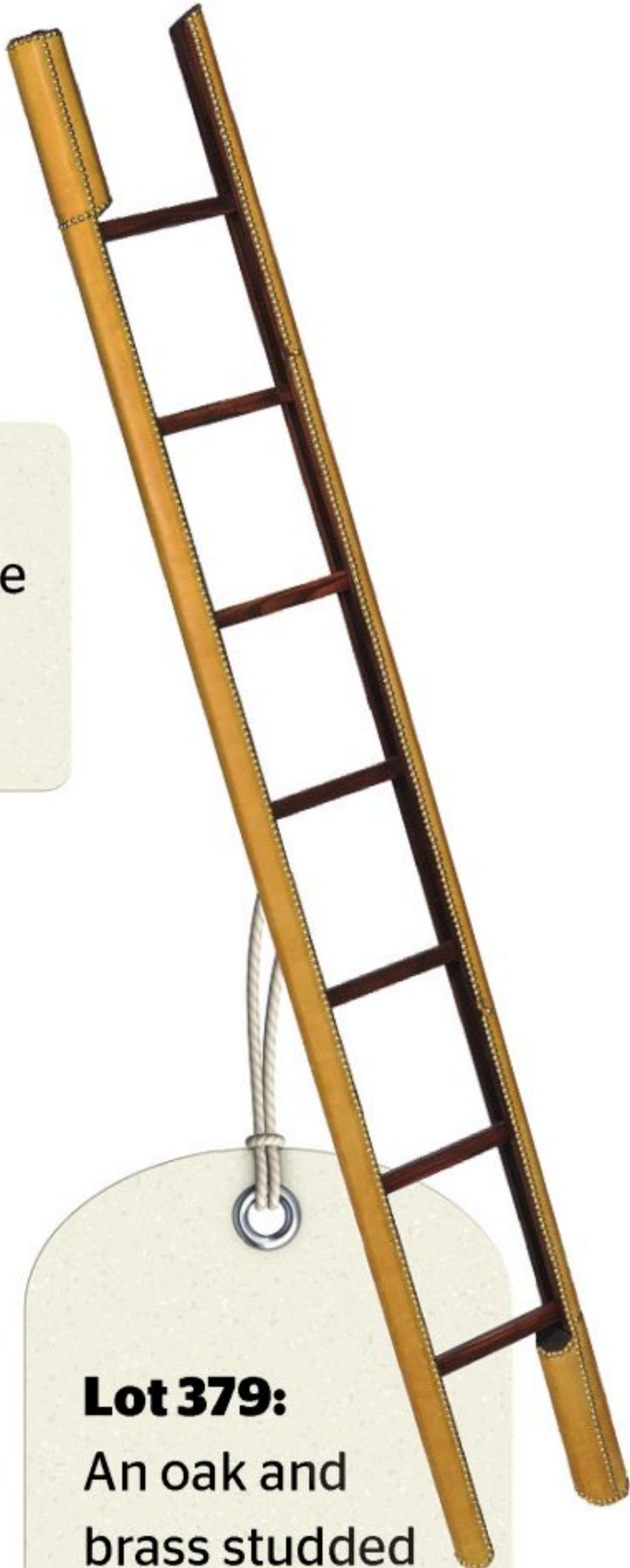
Lot 139:
 Antiquaries Prefer Shell by Clifford and Rosemary Ellis, colour lithographic poster.
Estimate: £600-£800
Sold for: £1,364



Lot 243:
 A French faience bird cage
Estimate: £300-£500
Sold for: £397



Lot 476:
 A Charles II panelled oak chest
Estimate: £300-£500
Sold for: £348



Lot 379:
 An oak and brass studded leather metamorphic pole ladder in Victorian style
Estimate: £300-£500
Sold for: £434



Lot 548:
 Early Victorian turned and carved bone Barleycorn pattern chess set, mid-19th century
Estimate: £150-£200
Sold for: £174

Meet the auctioneer



Richard Madley has been an auctioneer for more than 40 years and is passionate about his work.

“My father was an auctioneer, and my father-in-law, too. It was in my blood. I work most of my time for Dreweatts as their senior valuer. Death, debt and

divorce are three big reasons why you might need an auctioneer and a valuer. I do a lot of work for families and estates across the country.”

Many people will use a valuer when insuring the contents of their homes, but Richard says he’s often amazed at how often people over and under-value their possessions.

“People have a pretty good idea of what their house is worth. Most people know exactly how much or little they have in their bank account, and yet what could be the most valuable asset in their portfolio – their collection of art and antiques – most people don’t have a clue about. They think of a number and often its wrong both ways – it can be too high or too little.

“Things don’t always go up. It depends on the flavour of the year and can change in 12 months. Darker brown furniture has gone down, but Chinese porcelain and jades and bronzes have risen exponentially. Watercolours are weak and oil paintings stronger, Persian carpets are out of favour, but Caucasian carpets are very collectable.”

The way auctions are run these days has changed as a result of technological advances, and Richard now finds he is speaking to more people online than in the actual auction room.

“Twenty years ago, I knew everyone in the room by name, now I might not know the people in the room and I’ve got no chance of knowing the 250 people who’ve registered online. So I look at the TV cameras and say ‘Good morning wherever you are, welcome on the world wide web’. There are also the telephone bidders, the people in the room, the absentee bidders who have left you a bid. You have to have your wits about you.

“The three ‘fs’ my father always says is what makes a good auctioneer – firm, fair and friendly. It’s important they can see you’re not an automaton calling numbers, you’re an individual with a sense of humour and personality.”

When he is not sourcing interesting items for auction and handling valuations, Richard can be found gracing our TV screens in ‘Bargain Hunt’.

“I’ve been doing it for two years now,” he says. “When I first started it seemed quite daunting. You really do only have an hour on the clock and have a team with little or no experience. But the more I do it and the more relaxed it is, the easier it is. It’s a fun time.”

PICTURES: LORNA MAYBERRY; DREWEATTS BLOOMSBURY

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Hidden treasures

It might not be a tourist hotspot, but Bedfordshire has plenty to offer visitors, as **Lorna Maybery** discovers



Words by:
Lorna Maybery
Lorna is Countyside's deputy editor who loves exploring the great outdoors

SOMETIMES IT'S GOOD to take the path less travelled and explore places that keep a lower profile than the more popular tourist destinations. And so I found myself in Bedfordshire, a neighbouring county to the one I grew up in, but still an area I knew little about.

In keeping with this month's 'property' theme I set off to this lesser-known county in search of interesting architecture and unusual buildings and found pretty Georgian villages and towns and a couple of stately home gems.

Wrest Park

With architecture very much in mind, what better place to start than Wrest Park, at Silsoe, home to Thomas, Earl de Grey, the first president of the (later Royal) Institute of British Architects until his death in 1859.

De Grey was a huge fan of the French style, having travelled extensively in Europe, and he bought many of these ideas back to England. Very few houses were built in the 18th century French style, as Gothic and Italianate were more popular at the time. De Grey, however, employed the style throughout Wrest Park, giving it a unique appeal and the appearance of a grand French chateau.

Built between 1834 and 1839, Wrest Park is today run by English Heritage and although it's now the

stunning gardens that attract the most attention, it's definitely worth visiting the house too, where a number of rooms are open to the public.

Don't miss the grand staircase hall, which gives an air of opulence and space as it fills the full height of the building. As visitors approach the twin branches of the staircase their eyes are drawn up to the large family portraits assembled here from several of de Grey's houses.

A number of other rooms are decorated and furnished as they would have been in the 1840s, including the Countesses' sitting room. This was created by De Grey for his wife, and like the other ground floor rooms, was very much in the French style, but with a slightly lighter touch. A pair of guiltwood cabinets still survive from the period and the chintz furnishings match the patterns from a photograph taken of the room in 1865.

There are some fascinating exhibitions, exploring the life and work of Thomas de Grey and his architectural exploits. Other than Wrest Park, he also designed Reading gaol, and the interior of his London house in St James. He was also on the committee of architects who gave their expertise to the extension at Buckingham Palace and the completion of the new Houses of Parliament.

Outside, the gardens form one of the most complete remaining early 18th-century formal

BELOW: Wrest Park was built and decorated by Thomas, Earl De Grey in the French style of architecture





landscapes in the country and also has a number of important period buildings, including Thomas Archer's baroque pavilion, and nationally-important statuary. In 1758, Capability Brown was bought in to remodel the park and you can still see his influences in the meandering canals that form an artificial river around the Great Garden and in the irregular tree planting that replaced the formal avenues.

Woburn Abbey

Less than half an hour's drive from Wrest Park is another large house of great historical interest – Woburn Abbey. The name of Woburn is more synonymous with the famous safari park, which is open to visitors virtually all-year-round. But the safari park, the Woburn Golf Club and the Woburn Hotel in the village are all part of the 3,000-acre

OPULENT: A grand dining room at Woburn Abbey

estate run by the Duke of Bedford, who have their seat at Woburn Abbey.

The abbey is closed during the winter months, but it's possible to organise out-of-season group tours and I was lucky enough to be taken around the abbey by the curator Matthew Hirst.

He explained some of the background to me: "Woburn wasn't used much and because it was an old monastery it was in a bad way. In 1630 the 4th Earl made Woburn the primary residence. He demolished a range of buildings and built a new set of apartments and at the centre of it is the Grotto, one of our most unique treasures. The house evolved over the next 150 years and by about 1800 Woburn was an enormous Ducal palace, twice the size of today."

Having been commissioned for use during the Second World War to house many of the people working at nearby Bletchley Park, the abbey was becoming very rundown. In 1949 dry rot and death watch beetle were discovered and the family took the decision to demolish the newer part of the house to preserve the older, grander section. They moved back in 1953 and, in 1955, it became one of the first grand houses to open to the public.

Inside there are some unique architectural delights, including the famous Grotto.

Matthew says: "The Grotto is important because it's one of only two surviving, and the only intact, internal grottos. To include a grotto in the house was highly unusual. It was designed by Isaac de Caus, and he worked for Inigo Jones the great court architect of Charles I, who also designed Covent Garden. Covent Garden itself was built by the Russell family (Dukes of Bedford), so this was an important time in terms of national architecture." ►

UNIQUE: The fantastic Grotto at Woburn Abbey



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All the shells in the grotto are indigenous to the British Isles and the Channel Isles. There are thousands coating the walls and ceilings of all shapes and sizes, their iridescent shells glistening when touched by the sunlight that streams through the floor-to-ceiling windows. It's a truly magical place, genuinely unlike anything you will have seen in other stately houses and worth the visit on its own.

But the tour of the house reveals plenty of other fabulous rooms, and a surprising amount of art, including a large number of masterpieces. When a home has a dedicated Canaletto room, you know you're somewhere special. Step over the threshold and you'll be amazed at the walls simply dripping with Venetian scenes.

"The Canaletto room was created in 1800 to house these paintings," says Matthew. "The art was purchased in the 1730s by 4th Duke during his grand tour in Venice. There are 24 views and it's the largest collection of Canalettos on view to the public in the country."

There's more art on display in the Long Gallery, which originally housed 80 paintings.

Today, there are 40, 16th and 17th century portraits and it still seems crowded. One of the star attractions is the famous Armada portrait of Queen Elizabeth I, showing her as the Empress of the

EXPANSIVE: Woburn Abbey is the county seat of the Duke of Bedford

world with her hand resting on the globe.

There are dozens of gorgeous rooms to view and hundreds of fantastic paintings to enjoy at Woburn Abbey. There's long corridors that follow the original footprint of the Abbey cloisters and these are lined with paintings, and there's the grand staircase, one of the first to be built in the cantilever style and a novel feature back in the 1740s.

I could have stayed all day, but instead, I took a drive around the extensive estate where there are nine species of deer roaming relatively freely, and then headed for Woburn village itself.

Woburn village

The bustling village is recorded in the Domesday Book and its name derives from the Saxon words 'wo' meaning crooked and 'burn' a small stream. The village has been burnt down three times, the last time in 1724, when it was rebuilt in the Georgian style that we see today.

The result is a uniformity of architecture that's pleasing to the eye, although many of the buildings are medieval behind the Georgian façade. There's lots of small independent stores and a variety of pubs, although there used to be 27 inns, and some of the old coaching arches can still be seen between the pubs and houses on Bedford Street.

Also of interest is the Woburn Heritage Centre Museum, housed in the old St Mary's Church. The church proved too small for the growing village so in 1865, the 8th Duke of Bedford commissioned a new church in Park Street, completed in 1868, and the old church became a mortuary chapel. In the 1970s the church was deconsecrated and a trust was formed to save the building. The Heritage Centre now runs as a museum and tourist information point between Easter and September.

Houghton House

It might not be quite as grand as Wrest Park or Woburn, but Houghton House, near Ampthill, was once a mighty 17th century mansion.

It was built around 1615 for Mary, Dowager Countess of Pembroke, in a mixture of Jacobean and Classical styles: the ground floors of two

HISTORICALLY IMPORTANT: Houghton House used to be a grand 17th century mansion



PICTURES: LORNA MAYBERY; WOBURN ABBEY/ ANDREW ROLFE/ MARK IVKOVIC

Italianate loggias still survive, and are possibly the work of the famous architect Inigo Jones – they're important early examples of neoclassical architecture in England.

The last owner of the house was the 5th Earl of Bedford and he rented the surrounding hunting park to a neighbour. He was then unable to let the house without the park, so he ordered Houghton to be dismantled in 1794. The interior was completely gutted, leaving no hint of its former glory.

The ruin is looked after by English Heritage and entrance is free. As you explore the house you learn more about its history through information boards – but wrap up warm, as the wind shows no mercy as it whips around the exposed site.

Ampthill

Following my chilly visit to Houghton House, I drove the short distance into the Georgian town of Ampthill. In the mid-1780s John Fitzpatrick, the 2nd Earl of Upper Ossory, led a campaign to improve the town centre. Amongst other things, he created the current market place, put in a water pump and built the clock tower.

Ampthill is famed for its Georgian character, but much of that conceals works from earlier times, an example of this is the White Hart pub which has a façade from around 1730, which fronts a much older building that used to be known as the Red Hart.

Other notable Georgian buildings include Avenue House, the former home of one-time President of the Royal Academy and renowned architect Sir Albert Richardson, whose love of the Georgian period was legendary, and who died in 1964. A plaque on the wall carries a tribute from Sir Albert's old friend Sir John Betjemen that says: "He strove to preserve the best in English landscapes and buildings..."

I wandered around this pretty town until I found myself at the parish church of St Andrews. From here I discovered a lane that led to a lovely pathway almost completely enclosed with holly that took me to the other end of the town.

Ampthill has a rich history, and even had a castle and it was here that Katherine of Aragon lived from 1531 until her divorce from Henry VIII in 1533. The castle no longer exists, but there is the Katherine Cross, which was erected in 1773 in memory of the queen and was refurbished in 2009.

Bedfordshire is a county quietly getting on with its business, but it's worth shouting about its pretty Georgian towns and villages, rolling countryside, ruined mansions and splendid stately homes.

And don't forget the chalk escarpments that form the Dunstable Downs on the edge of the Chilterns, not to mention the safari park at Woburn and the zoo at Whipsnade. It looks like I've only just scratched the surface of this unassuming English shire. 🌿

FURTHER INFORMATION

- experiencebedfordshire.co.uk
- english-heritage.org.uk
- woburnabbey.co.uk



Where to stay

The Woburn Hotel is situated at the centre of Woburn, making it an ideal base for exploring this part of Bedfordshire. I stayed in one of the hotel's brick-built cottages, which had a spacious comfortable living room and a first floor bedroom and bathroom. The bedroom had a particularly impressive high ceiling with exposed beams painted white and was decorated in a rich autumnal colour scheme giving it an airy, classical ambience.

The Woburn Hotel offers a great choice of food at the 2 AA Rosette Olivier's Restaurant, where the service is friendly and the food is excellent. The hotel maintains that some of the best food producers are on their doorstep so they source their ingredients locally and devise their menus around seasonality.

The hotel is also renowned for its afternoon tea, a practice that was popularised in the 1840s by Duchess Anna Maria, wife of the 7th Duke of Bedford, who entertained her friends at Woburn Abbey. The hotel has now refined the custom and offers visitors a quintessentially English experience!

The Woburn Hotel is a friendly, welcoming hotel with 55 characterful comfortable rooms, knowledgeable staff and plenty of space for relaxing away from it all.

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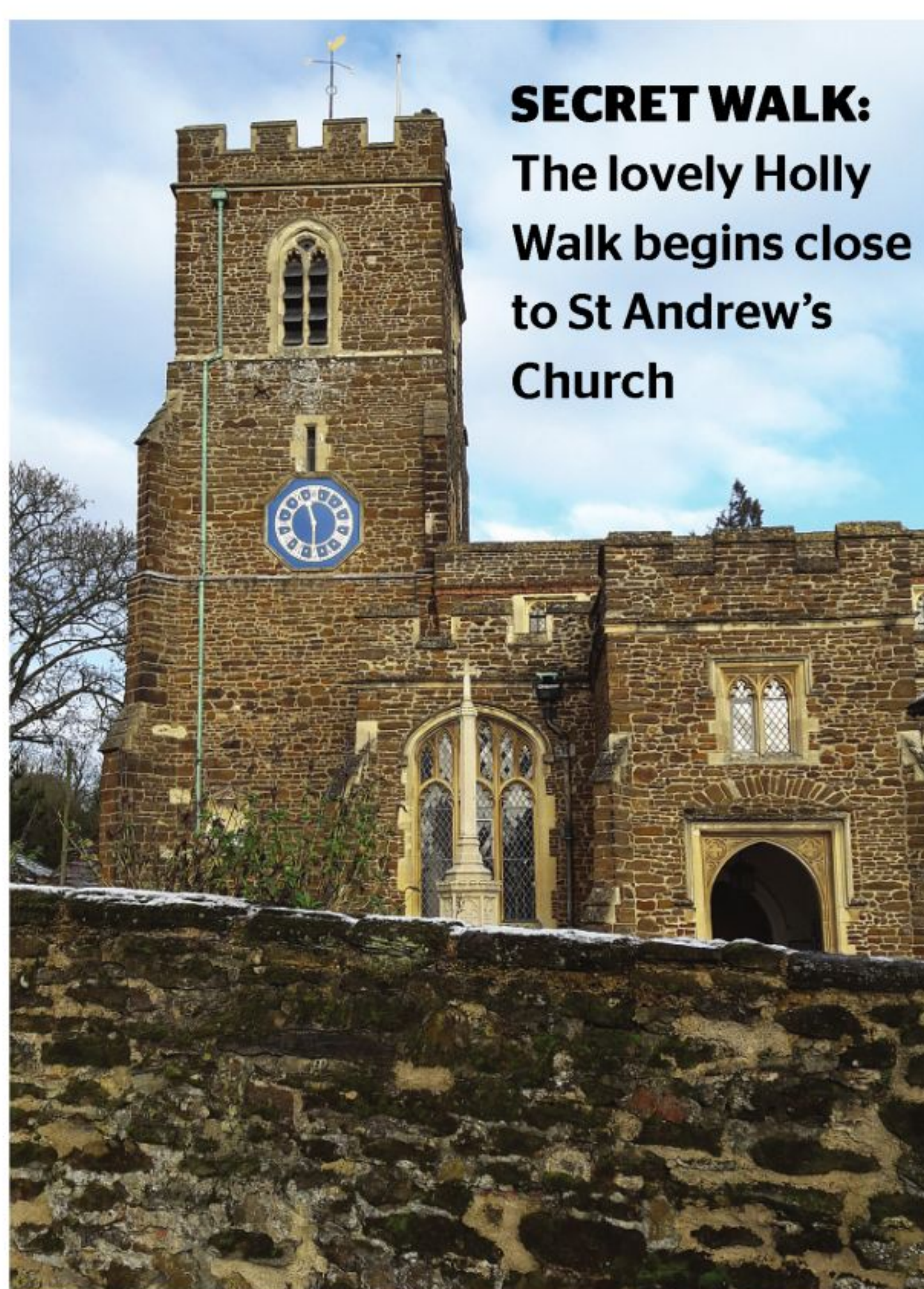
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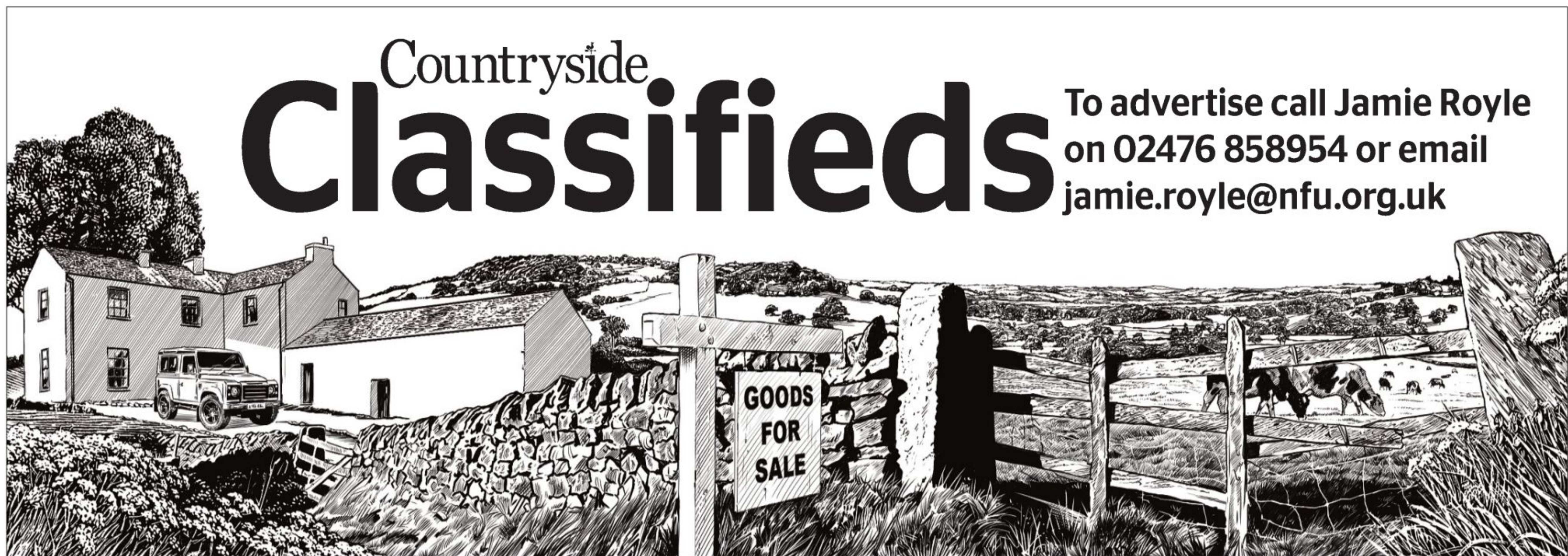
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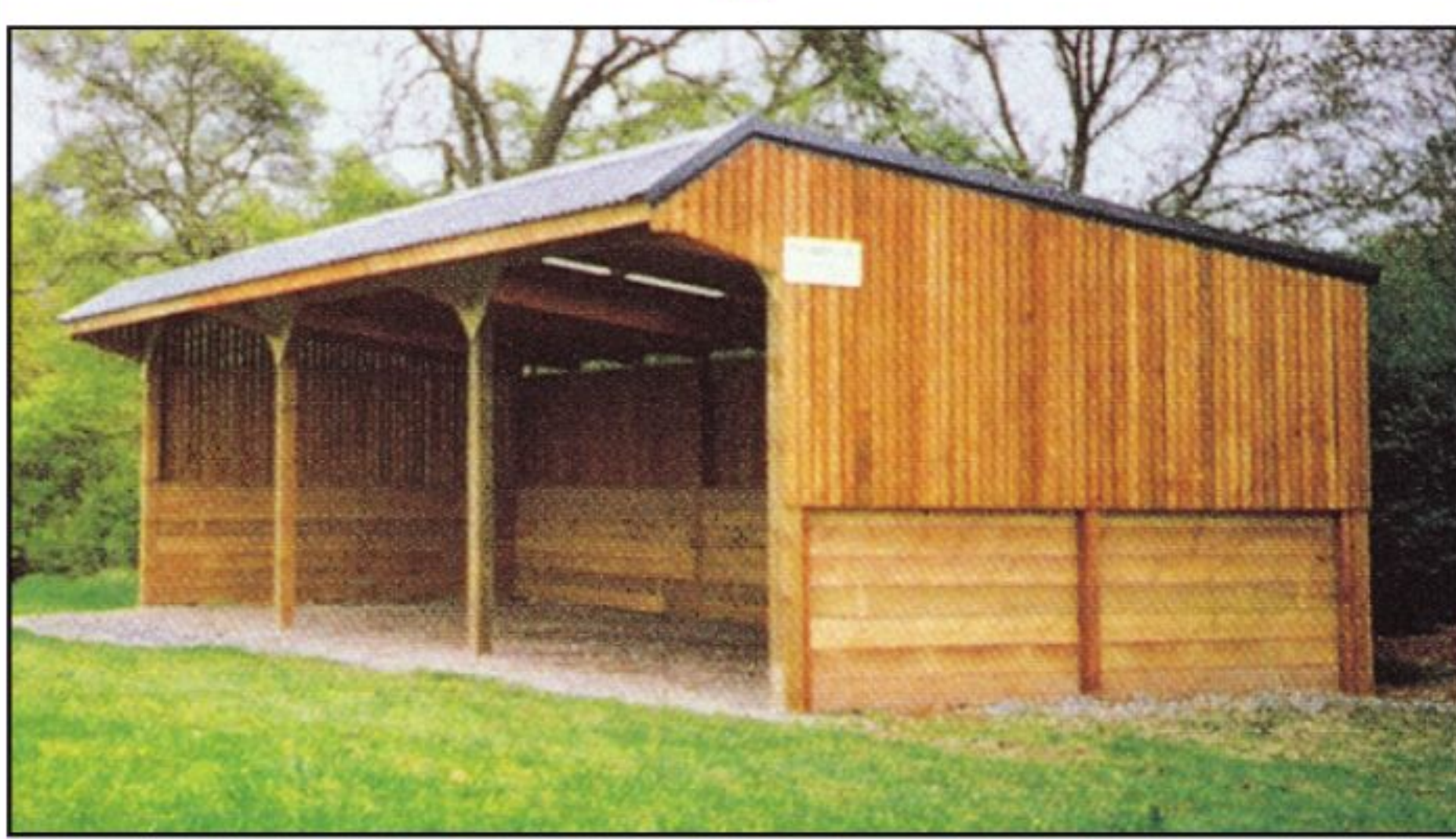
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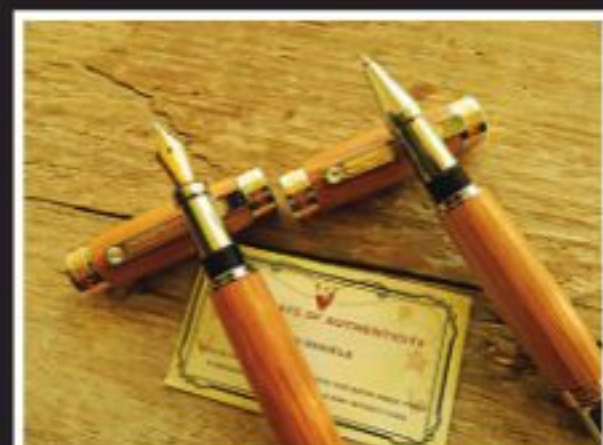
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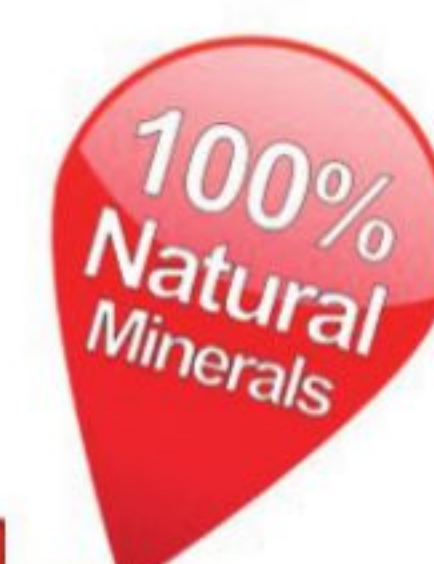
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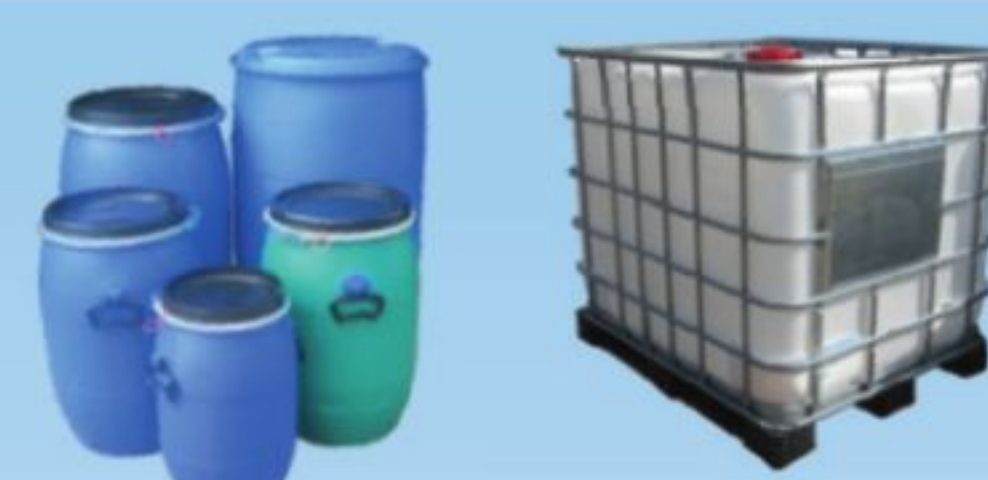


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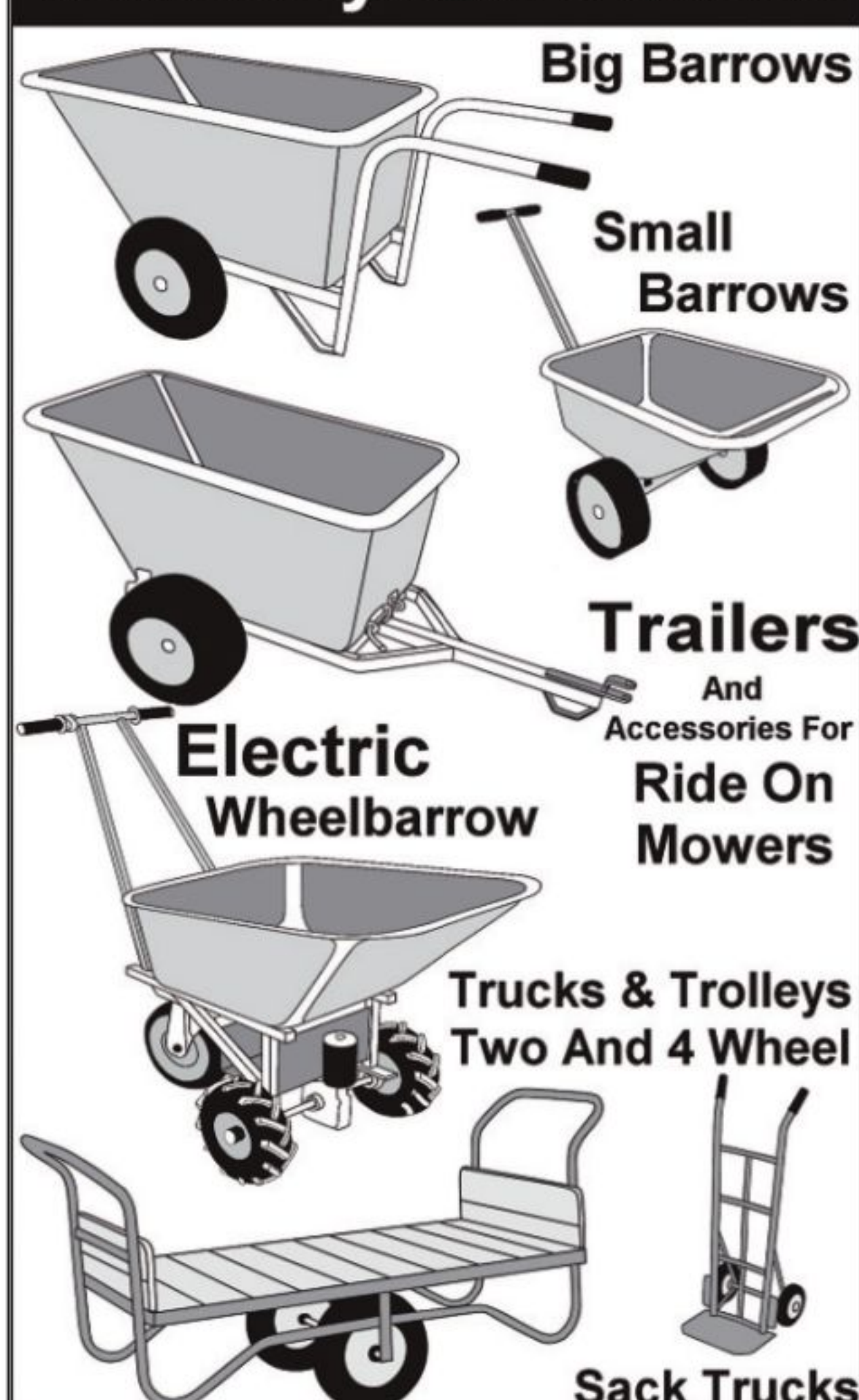
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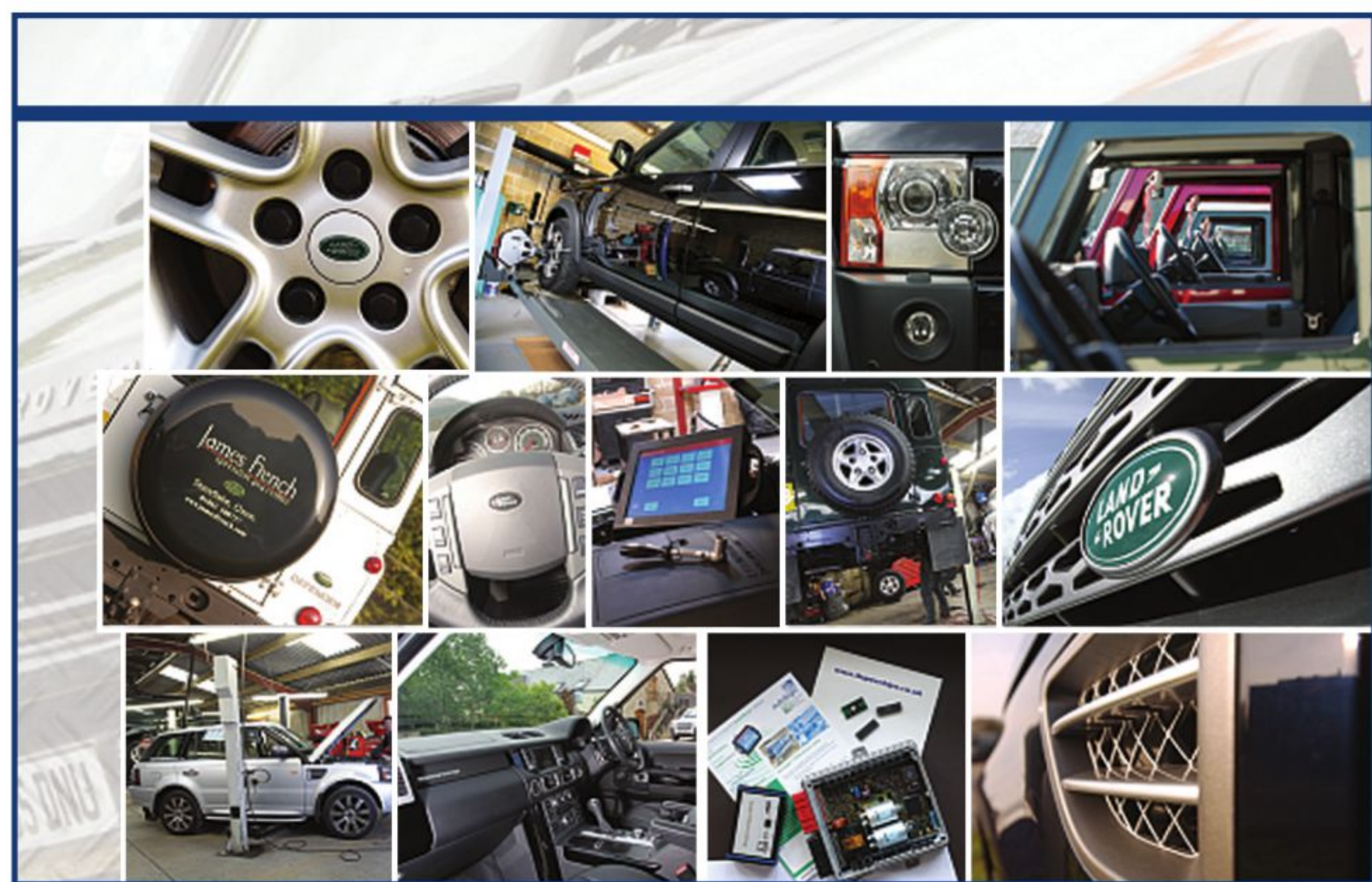
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WE KNOW PROGRESS will be slow this morning with two babies in tow. Finishing a task in one go is difficult with infants (nigh-on impossible with ankle-biters) so, as self-employed mothers, Elizabeth I'Anson and I have to adapt daily to their rhythm and work around their needs.

I feed three-month old Matilda, whilst Elizabeth sets up 10-month-old Magnus's baby-gym. We feel like very modern mothers indeed, taking our bairns to work but, of course, women have been juggling work and children for millennia and sitting in Elizabeth's living room across from her loom and a pile of folded washing brings this home more than ever. Nothing has changed that much over the years, except technology has made everyday tasks easier for us – Elizabeth hasn't had to beat and mangle her washing all morning, for example!

Over a cup of tea we discuss the craft of weaving. Emanating from a 'crafty' family in the Potteries, Elizabeth's mother taught her to knit and sew.

"I made outfits and experimented in my teens so when it came to choosing my degree, textiles was an obvious choice. I studied for a BA in Textile Design at Derby then an MA in 'Textile Design for Innovation' at Herriot Watt, where I specialised in knit and weave constructed textiles."

Although a career in weaving might sound like a risky business, Elizabeth tells me the prospects in textile design are very good. "You're not constricted just to the designing and making of textiles, you can do styling and trend-forecasting, which is a huge side of the industry," she explains.

Elizabeth, however, chose the path of designing and weaving and, after graduating, landed a job with Johnston's Cashmere in Scotland for three years. After several years teaching, including a stint at Birmingham City University, Elizabeth moved to Gloucestershire and started working on her own designs.

"And that's when I met my husband Tom and fell pregnant, which forced me to press pause on building my business for a while. But when Magnus turned six months I started to get into a routine and suddenly had a bit of time to make things."

Elizabeth now weaves part-time, selling her

Charlie's challenges Charlotte Reather has a go at weaving



Words by:
Charlotte Reather

Charlotte is a
freelance writer and
comedienne who is
always on the lookout
for adventure



START YOUNG:
Charlotte lets three-month-old Matilda have a go at weaving!

Japanese and Scandinavian-inspired creations on Etsy and her own website.

I sit down in front of her wooden loom: 'Jane'. "There are as many different looms as cars," she says. "This one's a Dutch sampling loom. She's not the quickest because she's not foot powered, but she's versatile."

Elizabeth mainly uses wool with a bit of silk, but today we are using cashmere angora. I'm ready to weave when Matilda starts howling. We pause for another feed and begin again.

"It's all about warp and weft," she says. "You design the warp and then thread the yarn onto the loom, which can take up to two days and is my least favourite part."

Once the loom is 'threaded up' the individual strands of yarn look like piano strings and, as Elizabeth hands me a piece of paper with numbers on it, I realise weaving is similar to playing a musical instrument. I carefully follow the 'sheet music' selecting the order of the eight shafts I need to pull down to create a particular pattern. As I strike a 2,4,6,8 chord, the selected strands of yarn are raised to allow the boat shuttle to be passed underneath them taking the thread with them. I pull the long armed reed towards me to beat the emerging cloth down tightly and return the shafts to neutral before selecting the next chord, in this case 1,3,5,7 to make a twill pattern.

I try a different pattern and need to concentrate to make sure I don't mess up, however, I do, forgetting to put all the shafts back to neutral before I select the next ones. Elizabeth looks at the cloth and says it looks fine, crisis averted.

I ask if weaving is a growing hobby. Elizabeth shakes her head. "Weaving requires too much equipment and space so it's not as easy to take up as hand knitting, there's also a lot to learn so without a basic knowledge it would be pretty tricky to master."

I wish Elizabeth well with her business. Finding a job you love that allows you to work from home, live in the countryside and be with your child every day is a tall order, but Elizabeth might just have found the perfect vocation. ♪

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